

*WRITING*

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**PAROLES GELÉES**

**UCLA French Studies**

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# PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies

*Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de  
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouvait ici  
l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.*

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

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*Paroles Gelées*  
Department of French  
212 Royce Hall  
UCLA, Box 951550  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1550  
(310) 825-1145  
gelees@humnet.ucla.edu

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## Interview with Terence Cave

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*by Helen Chu and Steve Stella*

*with an Introduction by Jean-Claude Carron*

*Professeur Terence Cave est titulaire d'une chaire "ad hominem" de littérature française à l'Université d'Oxford en Angleterre. On ne compte plus les travaux de recherche qu'il a publiés, les éditions critiques dont il a pris soin, les traductions qu'il a faites, les collaborations à des ouvrages encyclopédiques ou les conférences qu'il a données à travers le monde, le tout portant essentiellement sur des domaines allant du 16<sup>e</sup> siècle à Georges Eliot, en passant par Madame de La Fayette et Flaubert. Spécialiste de littérature française du 16<sup>e</sup> siècle et de critique contemporaine, il s'intéresse d'abord à la poésie religieuse et publie *Devotional Poetry in France 1570-1613* (Oxford, 1969). En 1979, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford) appartient à la première génération de livres-phares traitant de la littérature française du 16<sup>e</sup> siècle selon les termes de la critique moderne. Cet ouvrage, qui secoue les milieux traditionnels, aura un impact incalculable sur les études de la Renaissance en général. Arrivant quelque vingt ans après l'édition originale, sa toute récente traduction française (Macula, 1997), augmentée d'une nouvelle Préface, témoigne de son caractère incontournable aujourd'hui encore. Entre temps, *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (Oxford, 1988) aura marqué une nouvelle étape dans la carrière de Dr. Cave, son ambition étant cette fois de mettre en évidence une poétique de la "reconnaissance" dans la littérature occidentale, de l'antiquité à nos jours.*

*Parmi ses derniers travaux, on compte une *Short History of French Literature* à sortir à Oxford. D'autre part enfin, *Pré-histoires: textes troublés au seizième siècle*, rédigé en français, sera publié sous peu à Genève, inaugurant, aux Editions Droz, une nouvelle collection sur la Renaissance. Nos étudiants ont eu la primeur de ce manuscrit à l'occasion d'un séminaire que Pro-*

*fesseur Cave a donné à UCLA en automne 1997. Ce travail est aussi au coeur de l'interview qu'il a généreusement accordée à Paroles gelées. Dans cette étude de défamiliarisation historique, Professeur Cave nous invite à une re-lecture de textes en quête d'indices de la distance qui nous sépare de l'époque pré-moderne. Cet intérêt pour l'autre, rendu évident par ses travaux sur les langues étrangères et la traduction, est au coeur de sa recherche actuelle.*

*Penseur, critique, éditeur, traducteur, Professeur Cave est une des figures intellectuelles les plus fortes et les plus attachantes des études françaises aujourd'hui.*

\* \* \*

*Paroles gelées: Your previous work on the Renaissance, such as the Cornucopian Text, has contributed to a re-evaluation of Renaissance literature and thought. Can you give a brief assessment of the current situation in Renaissance scholarship, particularly in terms of any new developments in critical approaches towards sixteenth-century texts?*

Terence Cave: OK. That's a big question. It involves considering things geographically as well as conceptually, since there have certainly been all kinds of new developments in North America, especially, of course, the New Historicism which has come and almost gone, with lots of questions which have come out of New Historicism still being looked at, and people still doing similar kinds of work. In France, which is where I've been operating much more in recent years—and this book [*Pré-histoires: textes troublés au seizième siècle*, forthcoming] is written in French and primarily aimed at French colleagues—the situation is rather different. They haven't actually gone through the New Historicism. Some of them know roughly what it is, but others have no idea. They're rather more conservative in general terms, in that they often work in terms of a quite erudite approach to sources, and sometimes the whole method is quite traditional: they have never lost contact with the tradition of the history of ideas, the history of literature, and the history of literature in relation to ideas. But there are, of course, very interesting people doing ex-

cellent new work in France too, chiefly in re-evaluating areas like the one I've just mentioned, the history of ideas in connection with literature.

So where do I place myself in relation to those things? Well, I think that I have worked and passed through some of the methodological questions that characterize the New Historicism and taken points from there. Certainly I'm proud to have assimilated some of that into my work. But I've tried then to use New Historicism in such a way that French colleagues will see what I'm doing and be able to place it. And I think that means that, in general, I remain quite close to erudite methodology, making sure all of the sources are there and that one refers carefully to the contemporary context. It also means that I don't constantly refer to Stephen Greenblatt, for example. I think very highly of Stephen Greenblatt. He really did generate huge amounts of energy which is still going on, but obviously it isn't good for people to go on circulating in the energies he has released. Not referring explicitly to critical theory and methodology while trying to assimilate them is a part of what I've always done. In the *Cornucopian Text* I tried to assimilate what was going on in the seventies, but not actually to keep foregrounding it in my argument, and to rethink those questions directly through problems in the sixteenth century.

*P.G.: How would you see your forthcoming book, Pré-histoires: textes troublés au seizième siècle, fitting into the developments and approaches that you've just mentioned?*

Cave: Just picking up from what I said, each of the studies in *Pré-histoires* is quite precise and geared to a particular question or set of questions. The classic one is the way in which "*moi*" became a noun form in the late sixteenth century and what that means. Other examples are the first explicit use of the notion of suspense in poetic theory in the sixteenth century, questions connected with the way in which Pyrrhonism is presented in that period, some specific questions concerning demonology. In each case I tend to begin with quite precise configurations of texts and allow the general issues to emerge out of those. If you look after the particular, the general looks after itself: it's sort of

an axiom for me. I never go to the point of generalizing: saying "OK, now we can say the sixteenth century is like this."

Let me explain now why I call the book *Pré-histoires*. The series of questions I look at belong to, for me, the same class. They belong to the class of phenomena which we find difficult to assess now because mentalities have obviously changed since the sixteenth century, but we still think we can see continuities tracing back in questions like the self, like skepticism, or like suspense for example, which is something we now think is absolutely central to narrative composition and theory. The question is then whether those phenomena mean quite the same thing in the sixteenth century as for us. And so one tries to trace back to those moments, not from the present but from a point that's just after the moment when those issues become concrete in certain ways. You trace back from a kind of threshold moment, trying to establish how that kind of phenomenon was perceived before they had a word for it. Another very clear example which actually isn't in this book, but might be in a sequel or second volume, is the way in which a problematic set of economic phenomena were perceived. It seems certain that there was some kind of generalized inflation in Europe in the sixteenth century. But one becomes aware of it in reading these texts in very indirect ways. There is a text of 1568 by Jean Bodin, in which he says, "We're all worried about this thing. We don't know what it is and what has caused it, this rise in prices...," then he goes on to suggest a series of causes, including, for example, a massive increase in the money supply, caused by the influx of silver and gold from the New World. This is an extremely brilliant insight. He may not have been quite the first to have it, but it's clearly a threshold moment. And so you might well say that before that kind of explanation emerged, people saw that something was happening around them that they didn't understand. So we ask, what were the traces of that in the texts we read such as the episode in Rabelais's third book, "In praise of Debt," or in the fourth book, the business between Panurge and the sheep? And there are quite a number of other cases. So what I try to do in those cases is to put together clusters of examples grouped around – and especially just before – a threshold moment. That's what I mean by *pré-histoires*.



Obviously I'm not claiming that no one has ever looked at texts precisely before or operated in terms of particular examples. I find it actually quite difficult to define in what way that particular attention to individual texts is different. One of the ways is perhaps in holding back from amalgamating lots of texts into an ultimate generalization. What I do instead is try to see them as a configuration with lots of gaps in between but with oblique connections between them, so you get a constellation or archipelago effect rather than an amalgam effect. But put that way, it may well sound not very different from what some of the new historicists have done.

*P.G.: I'd like to ask about a specific example that you treat in your book: the automate hydraulique as described by Pierre de Lancre in his Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons. As we've discussed, this volume of Paroles gelées includes issues of technology and the body in French literature. For many, the notion of technology in the Renaissance conjures up images of the printing press and weaponry. We see that the automate hydraulique might be another example. What else might fall under the rubric of technology in this time period?*

Cave: Well, the other very famous thing to put together with the printing press is optics, because the invention of the telescope and ultimately the microscope are threshold moments just beyond this period. Before the threshold there were various striking developments in optics, which were perceived differently then from the way we would now perceive them within a historical continuum. Let's leave aside the *automate hydraulique* for a moment, and consider some of these questions of optics. For example, in the history of art there's the development of perspective and the discovery of the *camera obscura*, both of which seemed marvelous inventions at the time. Now, I think most people realized that these were natural effects and, of course, those who studied them and invented them didn't regard them as diabolical instruments at all. But the contemporary imagination certainly saw them as analogous to potentially supernatural effects, and so you find, for example, in a mid-sixteenth-century edition of Euclid's optics, the editor saying that by means of optics you can, if you study it properly, begin to distinguish be-

tween what is an optical illusion and what might be a supernatural effect. So many things that people think they see, like ghosts, can be explained in terms of kind of atmospheric mirror effects or some other such thing. So what does this editor do when presenting Euclid's optics to his contemporaries? He writes a preface in Latin, saying: "This will help you to wise up about what things are really supernatural and what aren't." Now obviously, we might think that technology always points in the direction of the secular explanation of things. It is the secular *par excellence*, in a way; it's something created by humans, under their control, and therefore by definition not supernatural. But I think, time and again, one sees new technology or technological inventions being assimilated to the possible invasion of the supernatural into human life. Of course, what people are often doing is trying to see where one ends and the other begins. But that means that they see them as often hard to distinguish, and that's the case with De Lancre. He says "There's this wonderful apparatus which, of course, I know is a human invention, but it's exactly like what the devil does." And there's a sense in which, as the metaphor develops, he almost reads this invention as if it actually is a diabolical machine; it's making weird things happen by supernatural agency. So the analogy tends to slide over into being a manifestation of something *alive*—which shows you that people are not making that distinction as sharply as we might expect. After all this is now the beginning of the seventeenth century and we're quite a bit further on from the invention of printing or Copernicus.

Another way of thinking about this is to follow Montaigne around in the *Journal de voyage* and look through his eyes at the different kinds of machinery that he's interested in. He's fascinated by all kinds of machines. There's a great security gate in Augsburg which is extremely ingenious: it enables somebody lying in bed, you know, a security guy hidden away somewhere, to turn a handle and some enormous gate opens and lets people in. And they speak through a pipe, and he tries to find out whether they are suitable to be admitted entry. Then there are lots of hydraulic effects that Montaigne looks at too. He's fascinated by those and quite a number of other technological inventions as we would call them now. But while Montaigne's eye is

certainly secular for the most part, I think it might be useful to look at the ways in which his thought about those things is integrated with other phenomena that he observes in society, for example, religious questions. His curiosity about religion and about technological effects are not so separate perhaps, as we might think they would be. For example, he goes to see a circumcision in a synagogue, and describes the procedure very carefully. And you can then put next to that his visit to the baths where he's trying to use the waters and observe exactly what's happening as these waters pass through his body. So in Montaigne, you get a whole series of things, machinery, curiosity about different forms of religion, the effect on his body of the waters, which I think add up in the end to something slightly different from what we would expect: his mind works in a subtly different context. A lot of his observations seem very familiar to us, but they're more familiar if you take them out of that context and bring them nearer to our time. If you restore them to their context, where people like De Lancre are around or Bodin, for example, then they have a slightly different feel. They're somewhere different on the map. So whenever you're drawing a map of parts of this landscape you have to put in other contemporary parts carefully to make sure you're not just kind of filling in an imaginary map with materials from our own consciousness.

*P.G.: You raise many issues that we'd like to ask you to explore further. Regarding the question of illusion versus supernatural effects and its relation to the man-made, you mentioned that De Lancre knows that the fountain is man-made and therefore not a supernatural manifestation of evil. Yet De Lancre still associates the man-made object with the diabolical. What might we learn about Renaissance theories of nature and artifice based on a reaction like this? How might this relate to technology and people's perception of sixteenth-century technology in general?*

Cave: Well, if you take it at the most literal level, what he's saying is that the Devil doesn't actually command nature in the way that God does, or disrupt nature: he creates extraordinarily brilliant illusions. He's like a superior magician or fairground manipulator who can do things with machines that make people

say “amazing!” and “Wow!” because they look so real. And so (says De Lancre) the poor simple people are taken in by it. So, that might be an argument to say that, if some woman who is accused of witchcraft claims that she has traveled to the witches’ Sabbath, or other people say that they saw her fly away and come back, they haven’t made it up, their perceptions are genuine, but their perceptions have no foundation in natural events.

That kind of argument was used by some demonologists in the late sixteenth century with what we would think of as a liberal emphasis: the “witches” were just suffering from the medical condition of melancholy, or were misled or confused by other natural causes, and so it was unjust to burn witches. But people like De Lancre and Bodin say that such illusions are diabolically engineered: the Devil is at work, and the witches have allowed him to take control – they have, in some sense, lent themselves to it. And in fact you might argue that what De Lancre would think is that whoever made this fairground object – the *automate hydraulique* – is not a very moral person. He has done something quite similar to what the Devil does, fooling people and playing with these actually rather disgusting things, and making it look good. It’s a sort of cheap thing, and is immoral in some way. So the *automate* begins to be itself a manifestation of the diabolic, even though it’s an entirely man-made instrument. I think we shouldn’t assume that either you have man-made technology or superstitious stuff about devils and diabolic figures, like magicians dabbling in the black arts. Precisely the way people saw all these things as operating was in terms of the model of technology.

*P.G.: Céard mentions in his Nature et les prodiges a similar idea that the Devil can manipulate natural phenomena and create illusions. Can we then apply Céard’s idea to the situations we’ve been discussing and see technology as an example of such a manipulation of nature?*

Cave: Yes, but in differing degrees. When Montaigne says there are these amazing fountains in the Tivoli gardens, he’s obviously not thinking that the Devil had anything to do with it at all. I’m not suggesting that. I’m just trying to create a spectrum of phe-



nomena, as it were, which are juxtaposed in that period along a line which connects up with the diabolical at one point and which at the same time includes the technological, whereas we would think of these things as being sharply separated.

Oh, by the way, people did argue about whether the Devil really interfered with nature and disturbed the course of nature, or whether he just created simulacra. All of that is very much a subject of debate in that period.

There are of course similar examples in Shakespeare, where you have scenes of "natural magic," which is a well known category in the period. Where something amazing is made to happen, but it's not actually a diabolic effect, it's not disturbing the course of nature. Hermione from *The Winter's Tale*, when she wakes up at the end, hasn't been dead in fact. But there is this heavenly music that comes on at that point, and there is the sense that something supernatural is occurring, though it's probably within the overall order of nature which includes the cosmos, the music of the spheres, and those things. So, there's what is called white magic, or natural magic, which is simply knowing how to operate within the domain of nature to make interesting things happen. In other words, one name that "technology" might have in the sixteenth century is just natural magic.

*P.G.: Do you think that the blurring of the boundaries between diabolical and technological during the sixteenth century is due to the fact that the technology in question is so recent, so new to them, whereas for us in the twentieth century, something new is invented every day? That especially with computers, we've become so desensitized to all of it?*

Cave: Well I think the novelty is obviously a part of the effect. When something strange happens that you haven't seen before, you think, "How does this work?" I still think that the technology we produce borders on the unbelievable. Recorded sound is for me one of the most inexplicable things—not that you can turn the sound into electronic impulses—but that there is this little box that actually turns those electronic impulses back into the full range of sound of a symphony orchestra—or gets the exact timbre of the voice of Elisabeth Schumann in 1932. Although I'm

not inclined to think that it is magic, because it can be repeated in exactly the same form time and time again. I think that we all have our thresholds of understanding of those things. And probably in the sixteenth century, when people felt that an invention had gone beyond that threshold, they said there must be something diabolic happening. They did so in the case of the printing press and gunpowder—not that those things were outside nature—but that they had been invented by diabolical inspiration, or by divine inspiration, as Rabelais puts it when he talks about them in the famous letter from Gargantua to Pantagruel in Chapter Eight of *Pantagruel*. So, even if the things themselves are clearly human inventions, they are so wonderful that they must be given supernatural agents. It's clear, then, that people did think that new "technology" was alarming or disturbing.

On the question of optics again, we know that the invention of the telescope led to a cosmology that was radically different from the preceding one. And we know also that Galileo in the seventeenth century was still having a lot of trouble because of that. Even if he wasn't thought explicitly to be dabbling in magic, his use of a little tube to change the shape of the cosmos was perceived as deeply threatening, and I suspect that behind that is the notion that somehow he was juggling with the natural. So you're not very far away there from the mode of thought that we've been talking about.

You can, of course, also talk about this in terms of power politics. The establishment didn't want their theories overturned because once that happened people would start to question other things. But I think that part of the agency of that defensiveness must be a kind of fear of the supernatural, a real disturbance deep in the force-field of their thought at the idea that you can turn the universe inside out or upside down.

But if you want me to talk about twentieth-century parallels, we still have revealing juxtapositions in the field of our thought. They're not the same ones because the far-out ones operate nowadays apparently in the realm of the quasi-fictional—science fiction and fantasy (i.e. the supernatural), and the horror film genre are thought of as being adjacent, aren't they? Often people who like one like the other. After all, the effects in horror films

are weird technologically engineered effects of the kind you get in science fiction, and in those cases you get a weird kind of estrangement or defamiliarization. And it calls on some deep level of worry about what the nature is of the world we find ourselves in, which is clearly not as easily controlled as people like to think. Machines give us the promise of controlling our environment, but there are still, of course, things that exceed our control like death and illness, and the very kinds of technology that we hope to use to get control can produce the reverse effect—like mutant strains of bacteria. Similarly, space technology is a big control exercise, but in science fiction it gets turned around and the Borg or other kinds of aliens invade with sinister versions of technology and disrupt our world because they have totally different kinds of perception. Those are the ways in which technology and the supernatural get linked up nowadays.

So we too have our rather unusual sorts of juxtapositions, which you can perceive if you go into bookshops, like the New Age ones, where there will be a range of different ways of believing juxtaposed on the shelves that you wouldn't have seen there a while ago, and you certainly wouldn't have seen in the sixteenth century. There's a kind of a mindset which has incorporated into modern technology some of those ancient fears. By the way, I only make those kinds of wild transhistorical comparisons orally.

*P.G.: It sometimes seems as if humans have not changed all that much from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century. We approach issues of technology, each having our own particular thresholds of tolerance and mindsets. Do you feel that there are major differences in our conceptions of the term technology in the twentieth century as opposed to the sixteenth century?*

Cave: I wasn't trying to say that we are all the same. That wasn't the point at all. I just tried to create a kind of analogy to suggest that things are not so clear-cut for us now as we might sometimes think. It's obvious that the growth of science and the way it is now studied, the role it plays in our epistemology, together with the gradual secularization of our lives, the relativization of belief systems and so on, means that technology doesn't play the same role at all as it did four hundred years ago. So, you don't

actually burn people who go to see horror films, for example. It wouldn't even cross your mind to decide that it was a heresy, or that there was something deeply wrong with it. The worst you might do is that you might regard it as kind of heretical among intellectuals and say, "Oh God that trash. You don't really go and see that stuff, do you?" Or say it's unhealthy, or it encourages children to do peculiar things. But people don't even prosecute the makers of those films. So that's very different. I think that it's interesting sometimes to take a very long view and say, "Yes, you know, the human psyche, or whatever you want to call it, doesn't radically change its structure. You usually get compensations for the various kinds of cultural shifts that happen." But it's singularly uninteresting to decide that in the end we're all more or less the same and human nature has never changed.

The interesting movement is the opposite one where you try to pin down precise mutations of those long-term or deep structures. So, for example, when I wrote up the stuff about that economic question, I began with the idea that there is a fundamental anthropological structure having to do with exchange and the danger of being taken for a ride: the shift from a barter economy to a money economy makes it much easier to take people for a ride and on a much bigger scale. And then if you have instruments such as the stock market and currency speculation, it gets even larger. So you get whole banks collapsing and global chaos.

You might say that the same anxiety persists throughout history in relation to those aspects of social organization. But the interest is to see exactly how it was figured in the period concerned, what kinds of image and what kinds of story people used to speak about such subjects and to handle their anxiety. Not how similar it all is. One of the reasons why I was supposed to come and teach somewhere else is not because lots of things are the same, though they are. Like talking to students: it's the same everywhere in one sense. But it's subtly, even often quite openly different. You feel the underlying structure differently. People have different cultural backgrounds. They have different political perception of these questions. Different ethical perceptions... So the interest is the difference. That's why I like not only going to other places but also trying to learn other



languages. It's like Montaigne says in his travel journal: you don't go to other places to meet Frenchmen who speak French. You try to acquire a different vocabulary or project yourself outward.

That's why I like science fiction, at least the creative kind, because it's always trying to think otherwise. Sometimes a bit sadly it does the opposite: you just get back to firing at whatever it is that comes over your horizon and looks different from you. But, you know, what seems to me the most powerful drive in science fiction is the attempt to imagine the beautiful Other in some way. Some amazingly different Other that you couldn't have possibly have got out of your own head. We know it does come out of our own head because we invent it. But the exercise to try and do it is endlessly fascinating. The example I gave in the *Pré-histoires* class was trying to imagine a culture that had a language so different that it was virtually untranslatable, yet it must still be in some way translatable. There would be people thinking about that and the kinds of symbols that they should put on these craft that they send up—patterns of electronic impulses that they send out into space so that people would see that at least there's a pattern. We must always assume there's something that's translatable or recognizable. But the interest would be what we, the receivers, would do with a very complex language of another race which was based on completely different pre-suppositions: that would be of immense appeal—the kind of thing I would take as a paradigm of my interest in science fiction, and in literature as a historical phenomenon.

*P.G.: Following this line of thought, could we then view the mindset of the sixteenth century as "other?"—that despite our common humanity, sixteenth-century thought remains alien to us because of a wide gap in time and culture? If so, what do you think are some of the "other" aspects of the sixteenth century?*

Cave: Well, that's of course the central question, it is a famous one and quite a difficult one. Because I think that it isn't in some sort of big category, like you say, "Well, they believed in witches much more than we do." There was a case of witch hunting in Wales recently where it was thought that there were diabolical things going on, and there were a series of raids on houses by the

social services, taking children away from their parents. Later it was decided that the reports were unfounded. It's true, probably, that the people who were doing the raiding didn't think that they were dealing with the supernatural, but it would be hard to say that the categories are fundamentally different in themselves. So I don't think it's those big categories—the *themes*, as it were.

What I think is that if you read a lot in the period and try to focus on what is similar and what isn't, here and there it's as if you hear another tune. Or it's like learning a grammatical construction in a language you don't know, where the grammar is very different from the grammar you're used to. I don't know whether I want to cite examples: they become quite banal when you cite them briefly, because they get translated too crudely. It's a kind of strange sense that you have, a very moving sense that you're actually hearing something that's different, that you can understand only because you don't quite understand it. The absolute balance point for this, and the model's not mine, it has often been used, is once again translatability. We know that we can translate anything into anything in terms of human languages, but that we can never translate anything perfectly because there's always a residue. And the more alien things are, the greater the residue is, and the more the residue begins to be in the foreground. And the thing that's similar moves into the background. At certain points, even in the sixteenth century, which is relatively close to us after all, we do get the feeling that there is something strange that, well... you actually for a moment inhabit that other way of looking at things and then probably you jump back out again because you can't stay.

So it's probably an intuitive feeling which energizes the work I do without actually being made fully explicit. Once it's explained, it's translated and it's fixed, and then we're outside it, back home. I'm sorry to be so obscure, but it's something paradoxical that you have to expect. It's a movement into and out of, which I try to explain in the book in other terms—in terms of this figure of antiperistasis—which is a kind of strange paradoxical movement whereby the more opposite you are to something, the more it affects you... it's like the colder it is outside, the warmer you get. That's the example they use most often in the sixteenth century. And it maybe a movement into something which is

generated by attraction, like an attraction of gravity or some force field, you know, but when you get inside somehow it flips around and you're pushed out again.

In the sixteenth century thought often operates like that, and I try to analyze the specifically sixteenth-century bits of it. So I suppose that's it as far as my early modern interests are concerned. I'm actually interested in other cultures as well and would gladly spend much more time with them, because I would now much rather study a culture that's as different as possible. I don't think I've got the time left in my life to do it, because it would mean learning languages that are too late for me to learn properly now. There are things like the Sami languages and cultures which I'd really like to look at properly, and maybe some of the Native American languages. But it would take too long, partly because the means of studying them aren't available unless you go and live with the people themselves for a while. But the more different the language or culture is now, the more it attracts me, which is why I think I probably won't do much more sixteenth-century work after this, because in a way it is, after all, too close.

*P.G.: But do you see some of your future professional interests or activities still tending towards the literary and/or historical?*

Cave: Well, I think I've got enough to keep myself going for the rest of my professional career just in terms of finishing off the things I'm supposed to do now and the spin-off from those. But I think probably they will increasingly be accompanied, in the margins of my life, as far as I have any, by other activities which will be probes into the areas I just mentioned. I already spend a certain amount of time acquiring languages that are relatively unfamiliar, even just little bits of them, because it's very refreshing to make yourself turn your mind around and think in terms of a language which has, for example, separate categories of verbs or verb forms depending on whether the object of the verb is definite or indefinite—using a different ending when you say, "I want the menu," from when you say, "I want a menu." Once you get your mind to think, "Oh well, that's normal," then you begin to see the world categorized in that way. As I said, I can't get very far because obviously it would take years to get really

into the middle of those things. So I know that this is just dabbling on the surface, but I think at this stage of my life I can afford to do that. It's become a personal activity rather than a professional one.

*P.G.: We're all in the same boat, so to speak, for having taken up a foreign language and trying to come to terms with it and naturalize it, and to get as close as we can to it with a native fluency level, and it's frustrating because sometimes you realize you'll never get there. You'll get close but...*

Cave: Well I use French in a very easy way now in a sense, but there's no doubt that when I write French there's slightly more friction than when I write English. I'm forced to use it with less freedom, if you like. Though that's quite a good discipline. And when I speak it to colleagues in France or give a talk in French, I'm never quite sure how it's going to sound at the other end, whether that level of rhetoric, that for me is a little bit more formal than I would think of using in English, really does sound natural to them. I can't quite judge that naturalness or disassociate my sense of it being rather rhetorical in the negative sense. So, yes, it's there to the last, that friction you encounter the minute you go into another language and it's part of the fun of learning languages. They're alternate worlds.

*Helen Chu is doctoral student in French at the University of California, Los Angeles; and Steve Stella is a doctoral student in Comparative Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles.*



# Virtual Bodies: Anatomy, Technology, and the Inhuman in Descartes

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*Dalia Judovitz*

René Descartes's *Discourse on the Method* (1637) marks a major turning point in the representation of the body in the Western tradition. Rather than valorizing the lived body and notions of experience, as his predecessor Michel de Montaigne had done in *The Essays* (1588), Descartes focuses on the body no longer as subject, but as object of knowledge, by redefining it anatomically, technologically, and philosophically.<sup>1</sup> He proceeds from the anatomical redefinition of the body in terms of the circulation of blood, to its technological resynthesis as a machine, only to ascertain its philosophical reduction to a material thing. Descartes's elaboration of the mind-body duality will reinforce the autonomy of the body as a material thing, whose purely objective and mechanical character will mark a fundamental departure from previous humanist traditions. Decontextualized from its wordly fabric, the Cartesian body will cease to function by reference to the human, since its lived, experiential reality will be supplanted through mechanical analogues.<sup>2</sup>

Descartes's anatomical interpretation of the body in terms of the circulation of blood breaks away from earlier humoral conceptions of the body predominant into the early part of the seventeenth century. Dating back to Galen (Claudius Galenus, 130–200? A.D.), the body's physiological complexion was understood to be governed by the interplay and balance of the four humors: blood, phlegm, choler (yellow bile) and melancholy (black bile). This humoral conception enabled an understanding of the body that was flexible and transitive, since the body's complexion changed depending on the specific combinations and particular mixture of these four fluids.<sup>3</sup> The dominance of any particular humor created an imbalance that shifted the individual's complexion from health to disease. This humoral interpretation of

the body marked its embodied character and reflected its analogical relations to nature, as the juncture of the microcosm to the macrocosm. By privileging blood alone as the defining element of the body, one whose circulation and conservation will be based on mechanical principles, Descartes homogenizes the complexion of the human body, while disengaging it from the larger cosmic order.

Descartes's definition of the body is based on two newly emergent systems of reference, that of Harvey's anatomical discovery of the circulation of blood, as well as his own elaboration of mechanical analogies that rely on mathematical principles. As this study will show, Descartes's appropriation of Harvey's model for the circulation of blood will result in the disembodiment of the body as flesh and its reconstitution by analogy as a mechanical device. The mechanical organization of the organism will supplant its organicity, so that the logic of the automaton as a simulacrum will displace the priority of the lived, experiential body. Descartes's prioritization of rational consciousness based on epistemological principles, as elaborated in the *Discourse*, will lead to the disappearance of the lived body as a site for knowledge. His affirmation of the separation of the mind and the body will reflect not merely a metaphysical position, but a technological one, as well, since it will imply the objectification and instrumentalization of the body. This convergence of the anatomical, technological, and metaphysical models will generate a new understanding of the body as a virtual entity, whose mechanical legacy will continue to haunt the destiny of modernity.

## From the Circulation of Blood to Bloodless Machines

*The soul of all flesh is in the blood... Leviticus 17:14*

Descartes's account of the circulation of blood in *The Discourse on Method* (Part 5) is significant because it purports to give a description of the body based on anatomical principles. The effort to valorize blood rather than other bodily humors involves a fundamental shift in the conception of the body. To privilege blood as the defining paradigm of the body is to redefine its symbolic centrality in a society founded on the link be-

tween sanguinity and nomination, such as we find in nobiliary kinship structures based on paternity. Descartes's anatomical account reflects the emergence of a new symbolic order that valorizes blood less as a figure of hereditary transmission, than as a system whose internal circulation and closure defines the self-enclosure of the body. Descartes's selective appropriation of Harvey's model for the circulation of blood will lead to the redefinition of the intelligible essence of the body in terms of its material and mechanical functions.<sup>4</sup> Harvey's and Descartes's interventions reflect the emergence of a new concept of medicine, one that no longer relies on the "supposed isomorphism between the cosmic order and the equilibrium of the organism" reflected in nature's presumed powers to correct its own disorders.<sup>5</sup>

As opposed to earlier conceptions of blood which did not involve the notion of circulation, Harvey in *De motu cordis et sanguinis* (1628) describes the circulation of blood as a closed circle, where blood is recycled rather than consumed. The blood's enclosure within the pathways of the arterial-venal system establishes it as an autonomous system of exchange within the body. The continual, circular, and regenerative movement of blood insures both the preservation and regeneration of the body.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the circulation of blood as a microcosm reflects the movements of the macrocosm, that of the circular motion of celestial bodies. This analogy of circular motion inscribes the circulation of blood within the framework of Aristotelian cosmology and the Renaissance and Baroque world views that sought to establish analogical relations between the microcosm and the macrocosm.<sup>7</sup> Although Harvey compares the heart, in passing, to various mechanical devices (a pump, fire engine, or hydraulic device) these mechanical analogies still reflect an Aristotelian vitalist view regarding the centrality of the heart, rather than a mechanical worldview. Nonetheless, despite his mechanist tendencies, Descartes does not appropriate Harvey's interpretation of the heart as a pump. He explains the blood's circulation and movement as a result of the generation of heat in the heart, a position which he believes to be different from Aristotle's prior formulation.<sup>8</sup>

What may have interested Descartes in Harvey's anatomical model of the circulation of blood is precisely its autonomous character, as a closed and self-regulating system of exchange, that redefines the physical closure of the body as material fact. The circulation of blood defines the body as a self-enclosed system whose network character provides the pathways for its mechanical functions. The circulation of blood provides a map for the body, it enables its schematic and figurative representation, as a virtual groundplan that autonomizes the logic of the body, dislocating and isolating it from the world as its framework of reference. The capacity of the body to analogically mirror and reflect the macrocosm is disrupted, since Descartes's objectification of the body reduces its capacity to sustain and generate meaning. The body is no longer a mirror of the larger cosmos, it is a mere object whose mechanical logic and material definition reflects his philosophical understanding of nature as inanimate, defined purely as matter, extension, and motion.

The autonomy, centrality, and circuitous nature of the arterial-venal system enables Descartes to provide a physical analogue to the philosophical reflections regarding the centrality and autonomy of the *cogito*. In Part 4 of the *Discourse*, Descartes describes the discovery of the *cogito* as a hypostatic moment based on a fiction of total negation: "And then, examining attentively that which I was, I saw that I could conceive that I had no body, and there was no world nor place where I might be; but yet I could not for all that conceive that I was not" (HR I, 101).<sup>9</sup> The validity of the *cogito* is founded on the radical denial and elimination of all bodily and material qualities, so as to affirm the identity of thought with a hypothetical form of existence that is no longer grounded in the world. The artificial veracity of the *cogito* supplants in its definition of existence, the material reality of the body and its place in the world. By defining the *cogito* purely "as a substance the whole essence or nature of which is to think," which is independent of "any place" or "material thing," as well as, "entirely distinct from body" (HR I, 101), Descartes removes it from the realm of wordly existence.<sup>10</sup> Thus when the body is brought back later in the *Discourse*, its physical and material reality no longer references the same order of existence as the *cogito*. For the anatomical body described in Part



5 returns not as a living entity but as a dissected corpse, whose mechanical logic is associated with artifice of automata (HR I, 116). The anatomical description of the body in terms of the circulation of blood thus provides a blueprint, a schematic map of the body as an apparatus, whose intelligibility will be governed by material and mechanical laws.

### The Automaton as a Virtual Model

*Every metaphysics of man as the protagonist in the natural theatre of creation is embodied in the automaton...*

*Jean Baudrillard*

The analogy of the human body to mechanical devices is not new to the seventeenth century, but goes back to the late Middle Ages. In his treatise on surgery (1306–1320), Henri de Mondeville compares surgery to the mechanical arts, specifically to architecture.<sup>11</sup> More importantly, he goes on to define the body as the “instrument of the soul,” and he proceeds to dismember this instrument into its constituent parts by analogy to various mechanical devices involved in artisanal production: the lungs are compared to the bellows of a blacksmith, the elbow to a pulley, etc.<sup>12</sup> This apparent instrumentalization of the body, however, preserves its organic character, to the extent that these artisanal analogies imply notions of social organization. Thus Mondeville’s account of the anatomical body mirrors in its organization the hierarchical structures and bonds of obligation and debt that define the social body.<sup>13</sup>

Other possible sources for Descartes’s analogy of the organism and the machine date back to St. Thomas Aquinas’s passing metaphorical comparison of animals and clocks, as well as to Gomez Pereira’s claim that animals are machines, lacking any sensitive soul.<sup>14</sup> Descartes’s analogy of the human organism to a machine departs from these earlier formulations, in that the Cartesian machine acquires a new network of meanings. It designates an instrument for the transformation of natural forces or an ordered arrangement of parts that can function autonomously. It can also signify a combination of machines of varying degrees of complexity. In Descartes’s time the word machine also has an

additional meaning, that of a ploy, ruse or a machination. This latter meaning is implicit in Descartes's use of the machine as a heuristic device, insofar as it functions as the insignia of human ingenuity in its capacity to manipulate nature and deploy artifice.<sup>15</sup> For the machine in Descartes's works is not merely a technical and mechanical analogue of nature, rather, its marvelous, quasi-artistic character attests to the erosion of the distinctions between nature and art. It represents an usurpation of the Aristotelian interpretation of the *organon* that designates a functional part of the animal, since this notion of functionality is expanded by erasing distinctions between organization and fabrication.<sup>16</sup> The Cartesian machine results from the dismemberment of the natural body and its re-synthesis, manipulation, and control according to the dictates of a rational model.

In his *Treatise on Man* (written during 1629–33, alongside the *Discourse* and the *World* and published posthumously in 1662), Descartes does not speak directly of man. Rather, when speaking of men he refers to "fictional men," hypothetical analogues intended to cast light on "real men" in the same way that the axiomatic "new world" in the *World* is invoked to illuminate the nature of the "real world."<sup>17</sup> This ghosting and doubling of the human, by positing the priority of a fictional hypothesis in order to elucidate the real, emerges as a strategy of virtualization that enables Descartes to speak of the body not as a lived entity, but as a disembodied technical and mechanical thing. For what is presented initially as a mere tool for conceptualization, the "fictional men" of the *Treatise* or the "new world" of the *World*, becomes the theoretical prototype which will dictate what can be known about "real men" or the "real world." Commenting on the *Treatise*, Canguilhem underlines the deception that Descartes's theory effectuates, since the analogy of the organism to the machine ignores the concrete existence of the lived body in order to substitute for it a rational reconstruction:

The theory of the animal-machine, would therefore have the same relation to life that a set of axioms has to geometry, that is, nothing more than a rational reconstruction. Thus the theory operates by deception: it pretends to ignore the concrete existence of what it must represent, and it denies that what it actu-

ally produces comes only after it has been rationally legitimized.<sup>18</sup>

But this rational reconstruction of the organism as a machine is itself a construction based on mathematical geometrical principles. Its legitimacy is derived not from the body that it putatively represents, but from the general mathematization of nature. Its priority relies on the preeminence of epistemology, which as a theory of knowledge must precede all other understanding of the world.<sup>19</sup> Having inaugurated his *Treatise* with the claim that these [fictional] men possess a soul and a body, Descartes in effect separates the two by considering the body alone. Although he briefly mentions the union of the body and the soul, this topic will be left largely untreated. For the *Treatise* will focus on the workings of the body alone, considered not as a real entity, but as a hypothetical, virtual construct:

I suppose the body to be nothing but a statue or machine made of earth, which God forms with the explicit intention of making it as much as possible like us. Thus God not only gives it externally the colours and shapes of all the parts of our bodies, but also places inside it all the parts required to make it walk, eat, breathe, and indeed imitate all those of our functions which can be imagined to proceed from matter and to depend solely on the disposition of our organs.

We see clocks, artificial fountains, mills and such other machines which, although man-made, have the power to move of their own accord in many different ways. But I am supposing this machine to be made by the hand of God, and so I think you may think it capable of a greater variety of movements than I could possibly imagine in it, and of exhibiting more artistry than I could possibly ascribe to it. (PWD I, 99)

Briefly alluding to the Biblical creation of the body as a statue made of earth (*Genesis 2:7*), Descartes rewrites this mythic origin. His description of the human body as a statue and then as a machine undermines its Biblical status as a vessel which is animated by the breath of God. Endowed with the external semblance of the human body, this artificial replica mechanically imitates human functions, such as walking, eating, and breathing. The fact that Descartes includes breathing among these me-

chanical functions alerts us to the secularization of the body insofar as it is removed from the sacred purview of the *pneuma* (breath, or soul).<sup>20</sup> This secularization of the body is accompanied by its dehumanization. By describing human functions in purely mechanical terms, as proceeding from matter and depending solely on the disposition of the organs, Descartes dehumanizes them insofar as they cease to refer to the organic reality of the lived body. These mechanical analogues simulate elements involved in the organization of the lived body only to sublimate them technologically. This conflation of the material and mechanical aspects of the organization of the body with its overall definition as an organism reflect Descartes's reassignment of the human to the mind, instead of the body.

Descartes's subsequent mention of man-made machines, such as clocks, artificial fountains and mills that have the power to move of their own accord, serves to underline human technical ingenuity. This allusion to the power of machines as artisanal products is a testament to God's superior productive capacity to fabricate the human body as an infinitely complex mechanical device. According to Descartes's account, God the creator becomes God the fabricator, the consummate artisan, who disposes of infinite resources and artistry. The gesture of divine creation which constitutes the realm of the natural world is now redefined as a form of fabrication that indelibly conflates technique and art. The natural world is thus sublated by the artificial logic of the artifact, just as the body is replaced by its mechanical specter — the automaton. As Canguilhem points out: "The intention behind the construction of an automaton was to copy nature, but in the Cartesian theory of life the automaton serves as an intelligible equivalent of nature. There is no room in Cartesian physics for an ontological difference between nature and art."<sup>21</sup> The Cartesian automaton does not copy nature, but seeks to gain ascendancy over it by becoming its intelligible equivalent. In so doing, it conflates organization with fabrication, and erases the distinctions between nature and art.<sup>22</sup>

But Descartes is not content merely to secularize divine creation by equating it with human technical and artistic ingenuity. Nor is he satisfied with eroding the distinctions between nature and art. He goes a step further by suggesting that nature itself, in



making animals, has created automatons superior to artificial ones: "Since art copies nature, and people can make various automatons which move without thought, it seems reasonable that nature should even produce its own automatons, which are much more splendid than the artificial ones—namely, the animals" (Letter to More, 5 February 1649; PWD III, 366). While Descartes appears to recognize the superior powers of nature, insofar as it produces animals, he considers them to be nothing more than automatons that are more accomplished than man-made artificial ones. In the process, nature as source of animate life is replaced with nature as consummate artisan of mechanical, but hauntingly life-like automatons. Since nature produces animal-machines, its perceived technological and artistic interventions overlap with human artisanal activities. From this perspective, when art copies nature it only reproduces the very processes of production attributed to nature itself. This instrumentalization of nature, as a supposed creator of automatons, removes certain aspects of its animate character, divesting it of life and vital action.<sup>23</sup>

When Descartes mentions machines to explain the inner-workings of the organism, he relies on the technical devices of his time: clocks, artificial fountains, and water mills. But in the *Treatise*, Descartes frames his mechanical analogies for the human organism by presenting them in an elaborate garden setting. Here, grottoes and fountains, constitutive elements of landscape architecture, function as marvelous embodiments of the human body represented as a mechanical system:

Similarly you may have observed in the grottoes and fountains of the royal gardens that the mere force with which the water is driven as it emerges from its source is sufficient to move various machines, and even to make them play various instruments or utter certain words depending on the various arrangements of the pipes through which the water is conducted.

Indeed, one may compare the nerves of the machine I am describing with the pipes in the works of these fountains, its muscles and tendons with the various devices and springs which serve to set them into motion, its animal spirits with the

water that drives them, the heart with the source of water, and the cavities of the brain with the storage tanks. Moreover, breathing and other such activities which are normal and natural to this machine, and which depend on the flow of the spirits, are like the movements of a clock or mill, which the normal flow of water can render continuous. (PWD I, 100–101)

If God created man in the garden of Eden, Descartes takes the marvelous artifice of the gardens of his time as a paradigm for the human body.<sup>24</sup> Instead of simply describing the body in mechanical terms as he has done earlier, he now stages its appearance as the unfolding scenography of a garden landscape. The mechanical complexity that underlines Descartes's description of the human body is represented as a veritable feat of landscape architecture and engineering, a complex system that weaves into its conceptual fabric various kinds of machines, whose structural and hydraulic principles ensure continuous motion. The human body is represented as a composite of various technical devices, parts of it operating like springs and others operating like channels and storage tanks, that is, conduits for the flow, pressure and circulation of blood and the animal spirits.

What is notable in Descartes's discussion is the fact that the system for the circulation of blood also doubles as the carrier of animal spirits. The animal spirits represent the most rarefied and subtle parts of the blood that are separated through a process of mechanical filtration (based on the smallness of pores) into the pineal gland situated in the brain cavity (PWD I, 100).<sup>25</sup> These minute corpuscles "cease to have the form of blood," since they attain a virtual almost immaterial status. Their subtlety or fineness is such that they take on the character of a "very fine wind" or rather a "very lively and pure flame" (PWD, I, 100). Descartes also makes an analogy between the nerves and the system of pipes underlying a garden. He models the nervous system on the arterial-venal model suggesting that neural circulation follows a hydraulic model involving tiny doors or valves placed in nerves (PWD I, 107). The nerves are animated by the passage of animal spirits who have the power to change the shape of muscles (PWD I, 100). Descartes thus mechanizes the nervous system by automating its functions, in order to explain its physiological processes in terms of the activity of the animal spirits. The inge-

nuity of the Cartesian model for the human body lies in its conception of hydraulic circuitry that simultaneously accounts both for the circulatory and the nervous system.

Descartes pursues his analogy of the human body with the gardens of his time, comparing external objects and their capacity to stimulate sense organs with garden visitors who unwittingly trigger mechanisms that set an elaborate spectacle into motion:

External objects, which by their mere presence stimulate its sense organs and thereby cause them to move in many different ways depending on how the parts of its brain are disposed, are like visitors who enter the grottoes of these fountains and unwittingly cause the movements which take place before their eyes. For they cannot enter without stepping on certain tiles which are so arranged that if, for example they approach a Diana who is bathing they will cause her to hide in the reeds, and if they move forward to pursue her they will cause a Neptune to advance and threaten them with his trident; or if they go in another direction they will cause a sea-monster to emerge and spew water onto their faces; or other such things according to the engineers who made the fountains. (PWD I, 101)

Instead of presenting sense perception in technical terms, Descartes re-stages it as an elaborate spectacle whose theatrical character is intended to illustrate its mechanical underpinnings. The artifice of the hydraulic machine functions here as an analogue for the human, displacing its priority through the display of an illusionism that mimics it. The choreographed movements of these devices triggered by the movements of the spectators suggest not only their autonomous existence, but also the illusion of personality and even psychology, inasmuch as these figures appear to respond and interact. The seemingly autonomous movements of these machines create the illusion of agency, as they mechanically ghost the human.

Descartes's representation of the workings of the human body by means of this scenographic garden display recalls the presentation of the anatomical body made available through the spectacle of display afforded through dissection. In both cases, the human body is rendered invisible insofar as it makes itself available as a display of complex mechanisms composed of spe-

cific mechanical parts and devices.<sup>26</sup> For Jean-Claude Beaune, the Cartesian automaton is a theoretical instrument, a virtual model that elides its own intervention as a heuristic device: "Most of all, the automaton is a spectral model, a sort of *theoretical microscope* enabling a 'sighting of depth': the anatomy and the internal movements are *seen* across the corporeal envelope, supposedly negligible, as one would see the wheels of a machine."<sup>27</sup> The opacity of the body as a corporeal entity is rendered transparent by the automaton, its spectral and mechanical analogue. Considered from this perspective, the body is no longer the means for the world's disclosure, for its autonomization as a machine supplants its corporeal character by substituting for it an organizational, mechanized logic.

## The Specter of the Inhuman

*For I am one of those who deny that man  
understands by means of the body...  
Descartes*

In the conclusion to his *Treatise on Man*, Descartes returns to his earlier elaboration regarding the relation of bodily parts to their requisite functions by reiterating his materialist and mechanist position: "these functions follow from the mere arrangement of the machine's organs every bit as naturally as the movements of a clock or other automaton follow from the arrangements of its counter-weights and wheels" (PWD I, 108).<sup>28</sup> These functions proceed solely from matter and the disposition of the organs understood as the wheels and cogs of a machine. The capacity for movement, that generates the illusion of agency, is based solely on the internal arrangement and disposition of bodily parts and does not require an external principle of animation. As Descartes explains, these organic functions do not necessitate that the machine be conceived by supposing a "vegetative or sensitive soul or other principle of movement and life, apart from its blood and animal spirits" (PWD I, 108).<sup>29</sup> Descartes here rejects the medieval conceptions of the soul as vegetative and sensitive entities that animate the body, in order to emphasize the purely material and mechanical nature of the body. According to Stephen Gauk-



roger, Descartes's aim was to show that certain psycho-physiological functions that had already been recognized as corporeal could be accounted for in a manner that did not render matter sentient.<sup>30</sup>

Ferdinand Alquié observes that Descartes's rejection of these medieval conceptions of the soul prepares the mechanized body for the reception of the soul, as a unique entity whose sole function will be rational and intellectual.<sup>31</sup> Descartes's identification of the soul with reason alone goes against the Renaissance vitalistic or animistic interpretation of nature, wherein the soul permeates the universe and is identified with life.<sup>32</sup> Earlier in the *Treatise* Descartes notes that "when a *rational soul* is present in this machine it will have as its principal seat the brain, and reside there like the fountain-keeper" (PWD I, 101). The rational soul resides in the mechanized body as the ghost in the machine, the centralized fountain-keeper, sole agent and administrator of the mechanized functions of the body. The immaterial presence of the rational soul that haunts the automated body controls its bodily and material manifestations. As Descartes later explains to Regius (Letter of May 1641): "There is only one *soul* in human beings, the *rational soul*; for no actions can be reckoned human unless they depend on reason" (PWD, III, 182). The rational soul becomes the sole point of reference for the human, for all forms of agency achieve their humanity through their dependence on reason alone. Thus the locus of the human becomes the mind alone defined as consciousness, intellection and volition. The removal of agency from all aspects of the body and its equation with machines will redefine the purview of animality as one which references a nature reduced to artifice and mechanics. For Descartes considers animals to be like clocks, that is, machines governed by the disposition of their organs and not by reason (HR I, 117).<sup>33</sup> Thus the reification of the human soul to a purely rational entity accompanied by the total mechanization of the corporeal body runs the risk of a materialist reduction, of the evacuation of all spiritual elements, since they may be perceived purely as effects engendered through material causes. Although Descartes defends himself against the accusation that his rejection of the sensitive and vegetative soul will open the way for atheists to deny the presence of a rational soul in the human

body, the rise of materialism in the eighteenth century, as attested by the writings of Julien Offray de La Mettrie and Baron d'Holbach, will prove him otherwise.<sup>34</sup>

In Part 5 of the *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes recapitulates the mechanical analogies elaborated in his *Treatise on Man* by reaffirming the equation of the body to automata and mobile machines. The perfectability of the human body as a machine brings Descartes back to the question of how to distinguish the human from its mechanical analogues. For if there were such machines that both bore a resemblance to our body and could simulate its actions, then fundamental questions arise regarding the distinction of the human from its inhuman, mechanical body doubles:

On the other hand, if there were machines which bore a resemblance to our body and imitated our actions as far as it was morally possible to do so, we should always have two very certain tests by which to recognize that, for all that, they were not real men. The first is, that they could never use speech or other signs as we do when placing our thoughts on record for the benefit of others....And the second difference is, that although machines can perform certain things as well or perhaps better than any of us can do, they infallibly fall short in others, by the which means we may discover that they did not act from knowledge, but only from the disposition of their organs. (HR I, 116)

In this passage, the machine analogy for the body reveals its troubling implications, insofar as the possibility of the mechanical simulation of the human body raises the specter of an inhuman double that could come to haunt it. Hence, Descartes's need to posit two specific tests designed to reaffirm the difference between the human and the machine by reinforcing the mind-body duality.

His first test, involving the appeal to speech or signs as the distinguishing mark of the human, relies on his valorization of reason. However, the notion of reason evoked in this context is no longer the disembodied thought of the solipsistic *cogito*, defined by its self-identity and transparency. Rather, this notion of reason emerges out of intersubjective and communicative exchanges, and it references the capacity of individual subjects to

represent or embody thought. As Jean-Pierre S  ris points out: "The *loquela*, the speech, performance and usage proper to human language is the unique and certain indicator of the presence of a soul that thinks in the bodies of others."<sup>35</sup> S  ris's emphasis on language as the defining characteristic of the human neglects the fact that Descartes's appeal to speech and signs suggests a more general understanding of the subject's capacity for representation as attested by the capacity for manipulating and recording of signs, be they verbal or non-verbal. For as Descartes observes in the *Discourse*, even the deaf and dumb are able to use signs to make themselves understood (HR I, 117). Descartes's statement regarding man's use of speech and other signs identifies the humanity of the subject with the capacity for representation. However, representation, whether linguistic or non-verbal, involves modes of embodiment through material signs. Thus Descartes's affirmation of the subject's humanity through representation contradicts his concurrent claims regarding the immaterial nature of reason.

Descartes's second test for distinguishing the human and the machine relies on his critique of the machine whose scope of action is limited because of its purely instrumental character. However, when Descartes criticizes the instrumental limits of the machine, he is also necessarily alluding to his earlier equation of the body to the machine. While reason is a universal instrument that can serve all contingencies, bodily organs need special disposition or adaptations for each particular action leading Descartes to conclude that it is impossible that there would be sufficient diversity in any machine to act in all events of life (HR I, 116). Thus while machines may be able to perform certain functions better than humans, in the end they are limited by the fact that they do not act out of knowledge but simply out of the disposition of their organs. Descartes's critique of the material limits of the machine, which is also an analogue of the human body, posits disembodied reason as the unique referent of the human.

Struggling against the ascendancy of the automaton, Descartes locates the human in a knowledge that derives not from the logic of the organism, but rather supersedes the organic by governing its mechanisms. In so doing, he underlines the superiority and autonomy of reason as a faculty which is independent of

the material and mechanical organization of the body, since the rational soul "could not be in any way derived from the power of matter" (HR I, 118). While Descartes recognizes that it is insufficient to conceive of the rational soul as "lodged in the human body like a pilot in his ship" and that it is "necessary that it should also be joined and united more closely to the body" (HR I, 118), the *Discourse* does not provide an understanding of their conjoined nature. Descartes's final conclusion that "our soul is in nature entirely independent of the body" (HR I, 118), will make it all the more difficult to envisage and mediate their relation. The rational soul's ultimate autonomy from material and bodily reality implies that it functions in a virtual, rather than wordly realm of existence. Having radically severed the relation of the mind to the body, Descartes's subsequent efforts to suture their division will continue to pose problems throughout his later works.<sup>36</sup>

Descartes's comments regarding the distinctions between the human and the machine bring out the fundamental paradoxes that underlie his conception of the body. His first test for identifying the human with the capacity for representation, understood not merely as speech but as the ability to communicate and embody ideas through signs, enters into conflict with his second test, which involves the limited instrumentality of the body as machine and material artifact.<sup>37</sup> If representation signifies the capacity for embodiment, for attaining material manifestation, then the limited or specialized performance of the body as material artifact could no longer be viewed in opposition to the mind, but would be construed as evidence of its embodied character. For the capacity of the mind to engage in representation is not a virtual event, but becomes perceptible and communicable precisely through its engagement with the body and material signs.

Descartes's efforts to distinguish between the human and the machine thus function as an implicit test of the mind-body dualism. The problem that will continue to haunt the Cartesian system is the inability to think embodiment, finding mediation between a disembodied reason and the mechanized body. Descartes's anatomical schematization of the body through the circulation of blood, and his subsequent resynthesis of the natural



body as a machine dismembered from the mind, emerge as instances of a process of virtualization that documents the ascendancy of the automaton over the experiential body.<sup>38</sup> Haunted by an errant, disembodied mind, the triumph of these virtual bodies over the lived body will raise the specter of the inhuman as one of Descartes's most significant legacies to the modern age. This legacy can only be overcome once reason is reembodyed by bringing its capacity for representation within the purview of the body and the materiality of the world.

*Dalia Judovitz is Professor and Chair of the Department of French and Italian at Emory University.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> My analysis is based on Michel Foucault's notion of epistemic rupture, that is of a historical and epistemological discontinuity between the late Renaissance and the Baroque and the Cartesian world-views. See his discussion in *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), pp. 13-15; 32-91.

<sup>2</sup> Descartes' position represents a rejection both of the French humanist tradition and of the Italian Neoplatonist tradition, as well, since his elaboration of subjectivity as a disembodied entity breaks up the continuity of the chain of being that enables the reflection of the microcosm in the order of the macrocosm.

<sup>3</sup> For a general analysis of Galen's humoral theories, see Rudolph E. Siegel, *Galen's System of Physiology and Medicine* (Basel: S. Karger, 1968), pp. 205-224.

<sup>4</sup> For a general account of Descartes' debt and reaction to Harvey, see Etienne Gilson, *Etudes sur le rôle de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du système cartésien*, 5th ed. (Paris: 1984), pp. 51-101. Also see Marjorie Grene, "The Heart and Blood: Descartes, Plemp, and Harvey," in *Essays in the Philosophy of Science of René Descartes*, ed. Stephen Voss (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 324-335.

<sup>5</sup> See Georges Canguilhem's comment in *A Vital Rationalist: Selected Writings from Georges Canguilhem*, ed. François Delaporte; trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York, Zone Books, 1994), pp. 130-31.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis of Harvey's work, see Walter Pagel, *William Harvey's Biological Ideas: Selected Aspects and Historical Background* (New York: Hafner, 1967), pp. 51-59.

<sup>7</sup> These analogies are visible in Harvey's dedication to Charles I, where he equates the sun, the king and the heart, see Owsei Temkin, "Metaphors of Human Biology," in *The Double Face of Janus: And Other Essays in the History of Medicine* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1977), pp. 281-82.

<sup>8</sup> See Descartes' letter to Plempius, 15 February 1638 (PWD, III, 79-80) and his comments in *Description of the Human Body* (1664; PWD I, 318-19). Also see, Anne Bitbol-Hespériès' discussion in *Le Principe de la Vie chez Descartes* (Paris: 1990), pp. 55-102. Descartes' preference for a model based on heat might be explained by his efforts to account both for the motion of blood and its distillation into the minute corpuscles of the animal spirits.

<sup>9</sup> All quotations from Descartes' writings come from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), henceforth abbreviated as HR, volume and page number, and from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), henceforth abbreviated as PWD, volume and page number.

<sup>10</sup> Georges Canguilhem also notes the dependence of Descartes' theory of the animal machine on the *cogito*, see his *Vital Rationalist*, p. 227.

<sup>11</sup> See Marie-Christine Pouchelle, *Corps et Chirurgie à l'Apogée du Moyen Age* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), pp. 170-73. Mondeville privileges the architect who is defined by the capacity to design a plan of action. This privilege, accorded to architects as a guiding paradigm for surgeons, also occurs in Descartes' analogies in the *Discourse* (Part 2), when he compares the philosopher with the architect who operates according to an overall blueprint.

<sup>12</sup> For these analogies, see M-C. Pouchelle, *Corps et Chirurgie*, pp. 176-183. Aristotle also makes an analogy between animal movements and automatic mechanical movements, like those found in war machines, such as the catapult. See Alfred Espinas, "L'Organisation ou la machine vivante en Grèce au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C.," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (1903), pp. 702-17.

<sup>13</sup> Pouchelle elaborates this cohesion between anatomical and social categories in Mondeville, see her *Corps et Chirurgie*, pp. 189-92.

<sup>14</sup> See Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* (I, II, 13, 2) and Gomez-Pereira, *Antoniana-Margarita, opus nempe physicis medicis ac theologicis non minus utile quam necessarium* (Medina del Campo, 1555-58). In his letter to Mersenne, June 23, 1641, Descartes denies knowledge of Gomez's work and dismisses it off-hand, but the similarity of their positions is striking; see G.A. Lindebom's discussion in *Descartes and Medicine* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979), pp. 61-62.

<sup>15</sup> For an analysis of the meaning of this term as presented in late seventeenth-century dictionaries, see Claude Reichler, "Machine et Machinations: La Ruse des Signes," *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, Vol. LVIII, Nos. 186-187 (April-October, 1982), pp. 33-39 and Gérard Simon, "Les Machines au XVIIe siècle: usage, typologie, résonances symboliques," in the same issue, pp. 10-13.

<sup>16</sup> See Georges Canguilhem's comments in *Vital Rationalist*, pp. 206-207; see also his general discussion of the relation of the Cartesian machine to the notion of the organism, in "Machine and Organism," *Incorporations*, eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, special issue of *Zone* 6 (1992), pp. 45-69.

<sup>17</sup> John Cottingham notes that Descartes is referring here to "fictional men," introduced in an earlier and (lost) part of the *Treatise on Man*, analogously to his use of the "new world" in the *World*, see *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, p. 99. For a detailed analysis of the role of the fictional and the axiomatic in the *World*, see my *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes: The Origins of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 87-97.

<sup>18</sup> Georges Canguilhem, "Machine and Organism," pp. 53-54.

<sup>19</sup> For an analysis of the mathematical and epistemological underpinnings of Descartes' philosophy, see my *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes*, pp. 39-85.

<sup>20</sup> In his letter to Renieri for Pollot, Descartes argues that the statement "I am breathing, therefore I exist," is insufficient as an argument for existence, since the thought of breathing implies existence in the mode of "I am thinking, therefore I exist" (April or May 1638; PWD III, 98).

<sup>21</sup> Canguilhem, *Vital Rationalist*, p. 207.

<sup>22</sup> This can be seen in Descartes' later claim in *Principles of Philosophy* that, "it is not less natural for a clock, made of the requisite

number of wheels, to indicate the hours, than for a tree which has sprung from this or that seed, to produce a particular fruit" (HR I, 300).

<sup>23</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 194–205.

<sup>24</sup> Descartes' description of gardens echoes Montaigne's own astonishment before the hydraulic marvels of his own time, see his *Journal de voyage en Italie par la Suisse et l'Allemagne en 1550–1581* (Paris: Club Français du Livre, 1954), p. 109. For a general analysis of French seventeenth-century gardens and their relations to metaphysics, see Allen S. Weiss, *Mirrors of Infinity: The French Formal Garden and 17th Century Metaphysics* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> In the medieval and renaissance traditions, the animal spirits are invoked to mediate the relation of body and soul, see David P. Walker's discussion in "Medical Spirits in Philosophy and Theology from Ficino to Newton," in *Arts du spectacle et histoire des idées* (Tours, 1984), pp. 287–300.

<sup>26</sup> For an analysis of dissection as a spectacle of display that renders visible the scientific gaze and the perspective of natural philosophy, see Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 65–76.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Claude Beaune, *L'Automate et ses mobiles* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), p. 173.

<sup>28</sup> For an analysis of the clock as the prototype for automatic machines, see Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1963), pp. 14–18.

<sup>29</sup> According to Gary Hatfield, the vegetative soul controls growth, nutrition, and reproductive generation, while the sensitive soul governs sense perception, appetites, and animal motion. Descartes grants the vegetative and sensitive souls to animals alone, see Hatfield's "Descartes' Physiology and its Relation to his Psychology," *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 344.

<sup>30</sup> *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 278.

<sup>31</sup> René Descartes, *Oeuvres Philosophiques*, ed. Ferdinand Alquié (Paris: Garnier, 1973), Vol. I, p. 480.

<sup>32</sup> See Leonora Cohen Rosenfeld's discussion of these neo-platonic and mystical traditions in the works of Henry Cornelius Agrippa, and Marcilio Ficino in *From Beast-Machine to Man-Machine: Animal Soul in French Letters from Descartes to La Mettrie* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>33</sup> In his letter to More, 5 February 1649, Descartes notes that animals do not possess thought, nor the ability to use speech (PWD, III, 366). In his letter to the Marquess of Newcastle, 23 November, 1646, he explains that he differs with the opinion of Montaigne, who attributes thought to animals (PWD, III, 302).

<sup>34</sup> See Descartes' letter to Plempius for Fromondus, 3 October 1637; PWD III, 62). For an analysis of La Mettrie's and d'Holbach's materialism, see Frederick Albert Lange's *The History of Materialism*, trans. Ernest Chester Thomas (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1925), pp. 49-91 and 111-123.

<sup>35</sup> Sérís refers to Descartes' letter to Henri More, 5 February 1649, wherein he states that "speech is the only certain sign of a thought hidden in a body" (PWD III, 366); see his *Langages et machines à l'âge classique* (Paris: Hachette, 1995), p. 24; my translation. Whereas Hiram Caton argues that Descartes should have posited thought, rather than speech as the true distinction between men and animals, see his *The Origin of Subjectivity: An Essay on Descartes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 99.

<sup>36</sup> See Descartes' comments in *Meditation Six* and his *Reply to the Sixth Objection*. Also see his correspondance with Princess Elisabeth of Sweden, especially letters of 21 May and 28 June 1643; by 1645 the question of the union of the mind and the body becomes an inquiry into the passions. This discussion of the interaction of the mind and the body attains its fullest elaboration in *The Passions of the Soul* (completed 1645/6 and published in 1649).

<sup>37</sup> My reading differs with Keith Gunderson's efforts to distinguish these two tests as 1) the language test and 2) the action test, see his *Mentality and Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 2nd. ed., pp. 8-17.

<sup>38</sup> However, this virtualization of the body will lead to the aggressive solidification of the body as the object of practical discourses, such as medicine and mechanics, that will attend to its administration, see Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*, pp. 93-94.



## Bodies of Enlightenment in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*

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Dianah Leigh Jackson

The following study is representative of a larger project whose central inquiry might be summarized as, How to see the Enlightenment? By making this inquiry I hope to echo the language in which one raised questions about the Enlightenment at the dawn of the so-called *siècle des lumières*. This language of inquiry forms a poetics of vision whose metaphors and figures are woven throughout the texts of Denis Diderot. Yet even in taking up these metaphors and figures, Diderot also criticized and offered an alternative to that poetics as well as to the privileged status it afforded to vision.

"Bodies of Enlightenment in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*" takes as its focus several of Diderot's articles: "Homme," "Anatomie," "Cabinet d'histoire naturelle" and "Irrégularité," written for the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* published between 1750 and 1765. These articles are the sites of representations of the anatomical body that exceed the metaphors and figures of vision by integrating a full range of sense perceptions into the general poetics of the Enlightenment, thereby disrupting the rhetorical and philosophical logic of Enlightenment vision. By examining the ways in which Diderot worked with the language of vision in his *Encyclopédie*, I would like to address how the Enlightenment saw itself as, for instance, the reasonable practice of knowledge and science, but also how the Enlightenment continues its legacies in our own reflection—in our own thinking about what it means to be reasonable, human, and humane as we go about our study of literature.

Diderot considered his *Prospectus*, which set forth the philosophical project of the *Encyclopédie*, the Enlightenment project *par excellence*. As such, the *Encyclopédie* was supposed to follow the natural order which determined the order of know-

ledge or disciplines making up the *Encyclopédie* as well as the order of subject matter within its individual articles. The medium of that determination was the body's senses, and specifically, the sense of vision. Philosophy in general and the *Encyclopédie* in particular were matters of the senses: objects of philosophical inquiry were also objects of perception and reflection—objects perceived by the body's various senses and, in an exemplary fashion, by the body's sense of vision. Because they are first objects of sense experience, objects in the natural world present themselves to philosophy as objects to be classified.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the order of the *Encyclopédie* as it was described in the *Prospectus* was supposed to correspond not simply to the diversity and order of the natural world but also to the body's clear and even clear-sighted presentation of that diversity and order.

In the articles that Diderot and his collaborators contributed to the *Encyclopédie*, *les lumières* or Enlightenment was figured as the end result of human reflection. Vast and omnipresent in its attention and focus, the Enlightenment illuminated at its very inception both the centuries that had preceded and those that were to follow. Throughout the methodological texts that introduce the *Encyclopédie*, metaphors of light, vision and insight recur, making the sense of sight an exemplary figure for the representation of Enlightenment reason and science. Extending from the general perspective of nature (the outside world) to the particular point of view of the individual, reason is figured in its most paradigmatic terms as light and reflection. The order of the senses, with vision occupying the first and privileged rank, would seem to be, as it was in Diderot's *Prospectus*, the order of general Enlightenment—"les lumières générales:"

On ne peut disconvenir que depuis le renouvellement des lettres parmi nous, on ne doive en partie aux dictionnaires *les lumières générales* qui se sont répandues dans la société, & ce germe de science qui dispose insensiblement les esprits à des connaissances plus profondes. (86, my emphasis)<sup>2</sup>

The overall effect of Diderot's *Prospectus* is the initiation of a poetics of an enlightened *body* which was to permeate the *Encyclopédie* as a whole—a distinct and differentiated body for

which sight and insight were proper and which led to the rational understanding of the world and of the enlightened body's place within the natural order.

Operating according to natural order, the body's organs, faculties and sense of vision are categorized at the pinnacle of a taxonomy of senses made up of relatively fixed and stable categories and rubrics not unlike those belonging to natural history, for instance, the rubrics of man, animal, plant, and mineral in Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*.<sup>3</sup> Nowhere is the *Encyclopédie's* general poetics of vision more impressively and immediately represented than in the frontispiece by Charles Nicolas Cochin fils (1715–1790) portraying the allegory of the *Encyclopédie* published in the opening pages of the 1751 edition [FIGURE 1]. The central figure of the allegory is that of Truth, a female figure radiating with beams of light that part the clouds framing the central scene. Truth is surrounded by the two other female figures: Reason, who is lifting the veil covering Truth, and Philosophy, who is pulling the veil away. Theology kneels at the feet of Reason, looking towards the illuminating light, while Imagination is extending a garland of flowers into the bright halo surrounding Truth in order to adorn and crown her. Cochin's allegory of Enlightenment epitomized in hyperbolic form (the form of the pictorial or visual arts) the general understanding and thematization of light and vision that guided the overall project of the *Encyclopédie*.

Diderot differed, however, from his collaborators in the encyclopedic project in one important respect that concerns his approach to the ordering of knowledge in the *Encyclopédie*. Diderot's particular conception of sight and insight exemplifies a poetics of vision that is proper to the Enlightenment, while at the same time offering a critique of that poetics and of the privileged status of vision. So while the group of *philosophes* in general envisioned the project of the *Encyclopédie* as one that would advance the practice of reason, Diderot also foresaw that practice as one that shifted between collapsing the fixed and static taxonomies of the encyclopedic tradition on the one hand, and restoring those taxonomies on the other.

Diderot saw an *Encyclopédie* predicated upon order and disorder, upon progress that was punctuated by periodic chaotic re-



Figure 1

(Used by Permission of the Ecole Française de Rome)

lapses into the past and abrupt advances into the future. In his article "Encyclopédie," written in 1755, we read: "Tel est l'effet des progrès de la raison; *un progrès qui renversera tant de statues, & qui en relèvera quelques-unes qui sont renversées*. Ce sont celles des hommes rares, qui ont devancé leur siècle" (184, my emphasis). Toppling the epistemological monuments of Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (as well as his *Advancement of Learning*) and Chamber's *Cyclopaedia* in order to pick them up again selectively meant for Diderot that the practice of reason could only be realized through the interplay and the vacillations between reason and sense experience.

In Diderot's meditation upon the task of ordering the *Encyclopédie*, the work of taxonomy or what he calls "l'art de bien



définir" (176), the practice of reason is at once more and less than what, for instance, d'Alembert envisioned in his *Discours préliminaire* to the *Encyclopédie*: "un arbre généalogique ou encyclopédique qui rassemble [nos connaissances] sous un même point de vue" (58). The encyclopedic project was, on the one hand, an uncommon art, one that, as Diderot will go on to conclude, requires the cooperation of a group of specialists:

Concluons donc qu'on n'exécutera jamais un bon vocabulaire sans le concours d'un grand nombre de talents, parce que les définitions de noms ne diffèrent point des définitions de choses. (177)

On the other hand, the task of taxonomy is the work of individual reason. Collaboration between diverse thinkers in the encyclopedic task demanded the judicious balance between knowledge derived from ancient and modern thinkers as well as from individual genius.<sup>4</sup>

The *philosophe* offers an example of individual reason at work on the taxonomical task by illustrating or illuminating the difficulty of the principles ("les notions générales") behind the *Encyclopédie's* organization. Again, from the article "Encyclopédie:"

J'*éclaircis* ces principes par un exemple: nous disons, sans qu'il arrive à aucun de nous de se tromper, d'une infinité d'objets de toute espèce, *qu'ils sont de luxe*; mais qu'est-ce que ce *luxe* que nous attribuons si infailliblement à tant d'objets? Voilà la question à laquelle on ne satisfait avec quelque exactitude, qu'après une discussion que les personnes qui montrent le plus de justesse dans l'application du mot *luxe*, n'ont point faite, ne sont peut-être pas même en état de faire. (176)

Here in the article "Encyclopédie," Diderot points to the complexity of general ideas that describe the myriad of objects in the world by calling into question the use of the expression "de luxe" (deluxe), meaning luxurious from the Latin word for excess, *luxus*. Diderot's reference to the use of the expression "de luxe" is itself an excessive one. It exceeds the usual use of the expression, making a foray into a lexicon having to do with light and vision, and, finally, Enlightenment itself, by exposing the



ways in which *de luxe* hides not so much the sensory notion of sight as sight itself.<sup>5</sup>

Diderot's line of questioning concerning deluxe or luxury objects momentarily slows and detains the processes of reflection, reason and figurative language. Importantly, his questioning is formulated in terms that themselves evoke Enlightenment, that is, the poetics or allegory of an Enlightenment which privileges sight, vision and insight as the method and procedure of reason in general and of encyclopedic reason in particular. Moreover, the expository or narrative voice that Diderot adopts here is figured as a sort of beacon, a source of light, illuminating not just the pursuit of knowledge, but the ongoing, not-yet-accomplished process of presenting knowledge in a precise and accurate manner.

A brief return to Cochin's frontispiece illustrates the sort of process Diderot describes in his article "Encyclopédie." The stability of the rubrics of encyclopedic knowledge (personnified in the figures of Reason, Philosophy, and Imagination) turns out to be mitigated by the movement that Cochin represents in each of these. The action of Reason, Philosophy and Imagination is a highly dynamic one: each figure is in the process of doing something without that action being completed. Reason's hands are poised on the edges of Truth's veil, lifting the veil away, and one of Philosophy's arms is extended, pulling that garment away, while the other arm is moving towards Theology in what could be an incomplete embrace. Truth itself, while less dynamic than these other figures, is nonetheless illuminated beneath her gossamer veil in a progressive state of unveiling or undress. Anticipating the outcome of this progressive state, we might read in the iconography of the figure of Truth the progression from the classic muse to the Revolutionary *Marianne*.

In contrast, the figures beneath Imagination and Reason, for instance, are in positions of relative repose and stasis. These figures fall into place at their respective distances from the source of light: on the right side, geometry, astronomy, and physics, and beneath them, optics, botany, chemistry, and agriculture; on the left side, the different genres of poet (epic, dramatic, satiric, and pastoral), and beneath these, the other arts of imitation (music, painting, sculpture, and architecture). The two sets of figures —

those in movement and those in repose—allegorize the important tension that exists within the Enlightenment as it was conceived by its proponents including Diderot.

This tension might best be explained according to the divergent views concerning the sense of vision, and finally, the role of the sentient body in Enlightenment. The allusion to the possible shades of meaning that might play upon the expression "deluxe" in the article "Encyclopédie" situates the Diderotian reflection on vision and Enlightenment in opposition to the general poetics of *le siècle des lumières*.

In his book *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Martin Jay helps us to see this opposition in an illustration of the classical notion of *lux* along with its counterpart, *lumen*:

Light could be understood according to the model of geometric rays that Greek optics had privileged, those straight lines studied in catoptrics (the science of reflection) or dioptrics (the science of refraction). Here perfect linear form was seen as the essence of illumination and it existed whether perceived by the human eye or not. Light in this sense became known as *lumen*. An alternative version of light, known as *lux*, emphasized instead the actual experience of human sight. Here color, shadow, and movement was accounted as important as form and outlines, if not more so. (29)

Jay's presentation of the difference between *lumen* and *lux* lends definition and clarity to the poetics of Enlightenment that D'Alembert and Diderot used in their introductions to the *Encyclopédie*.

What D'Alembert expressed with the general term of "réflexion" in the *Discours préliminaire* can be understood according to the idea of *lumen*, the visual phenomena that exist independently of human perception. D'Alembert's *lumen* reflects the antiocularcentric tendency that the Enlightenment inherited from René Descartes. The Cartesian tearing away of the senses (the very foundation of the *tabula rasa*) is, in Descartes's *Méditations*, a necessary and integral part of pursuit of truth and of the establishment of the *res cogitans*. Antioocularcentric science is based upon the privileging of the disembodied eye which 'sees' in only an abstract sense: the eye sees independently of the

body's experience of sight, but with the intervention of divine illumination. In contrast, and still following Jay's illustration, Diderot's *luxe* would be the infinite, luxurious variety of natural objects ("les objets de *luxe*"). Moreover, *luxe* would correspond to sight itself—to the material and specifically bodily process of seeing. In this way, *luxe* belongs to both the vast array of objects in the natural world, and to the bodily, sensorial experiences belonging to vision.

The sensationalism of Locke, Condillac, and Diderot himself placed emphasis instead upon how the body and the information that its senses provide were integral to cognition and in doing so interrupted and suspended the tearing away of the senses so important to the philosophic tradition of idealism. The thinking thing became the sensing thing. No longer to be *erased* so that the philosophical subject might inscribe its meditations upon a sense-less *tabula rasa*, the sentient body gained legitimacy as the vehicle and the object of philosophical inquiry, thus dispelling its status as mere illusion in the otherwise 'true' work of philosophy.

So while the Enlightenment might be understood as the continuation of an antiocular legacy, such an understanding is only part of how we might in the end *see* the Enlightenment. As Jay has eloquently explained: "What must be emphasized is the tacit communication of an oculcentric bias during the *siècle des lumières*" (85).<sup>6</sup> Yet the difference between seeing the *siècle des lumières* within an antiocular or an ocular tradition reveals more about our own post-Enlightenment inclination than it does about the bias of Diderot or of his contemporaries. To see the Enlightenment from the perspective of that difference alone is to overlook the sensory amplitude if not the luxuriousness of Enlightenment bodies.

Rather than characterizing Diderot as that subtle messenger of the Enlightenment's ocular bias to which Jay refers us, I would argue that this particular *philosophe* shifts our perspective away from the Enlightenment's either ocular or its antiocular predilections and towards its preoccupations with a body—a problematically enlightened body—imbued with the full range of senses and with the full range of functional and dysfunctional sense experience.<sup>7</sup> I would argue, then, that Diderot's inquiry

into *luxe* in the article "Encyclopédie" actually anticipates what was to become his exposition of the wealth of the natural world within the *Encyclopédie* as a whole. And, what is more, that inquiry provides a first critique of the range and experience of human reason as it was represented and figured in the Enlightenment's poetics of vision.

In the articles "Homme," "Cabinet d'histoire naturelle," and "Irrégularité," Diderot represents his bodies of Enlightenment as a consortium of senses—some functional and others impaired. These corporeal representations disrupt the poetics of vision and (in)sight from which *Enlightenment* and, in particular, the science of *Enlightenment* would otherwise issue unimpaired. In Diderot's *Encyclopédie* the body becomes an object of inquiry while at the same time it gives form and definition to what lies outside of or, more accurately, to what lies in between the categories and taxonomies the Enlightenment used in order to have knowledge about the natural world.

The bodies that Diderot represents throughout the *Encyclopédie* provide a means of assessing what was unique about Enlightenment epistemology in general. Robert Darnton, the foremost historian of the cultural and economic production of the *Encyclopédie*, has described that uniqueness in terms of "the new lines between the known and the unknown"(193).<sup>8</sup> These lines define not just different kinds of knowledge, but the sketches of disciplines that were not yet fully formed (for instance, the eighteenth-century disciplines of anatomy, chemistry and botany). The disciplines of the *Encyclopédie* contained within their outlines imperfect and even monstrous flowerings, proliferating in between the various branches of the Tree of Knowledge. As Darnton explains in his study of the *Encyclopédie*, "Philosophers Trim the Tree of Knowledge: The Epistemological Strategy of the *Encyclopédie*:"

It is the in-between animals, the neither fish-nor-fowl, that have special powers and critical value. . . . Hair, fingernail parings, feces . . . go into magic potions because they represent the ambiguous border areas of the body, where the organism spills over into the surrounding material world. (193)



Darnton's attention to the bodies that fall in between the taxonomies of what is known and what is unknown is helpful for our own sustained attention to what he calls the "violation of conceptual boundaries" that takes place throughout the *Encyclopédie* and, I would argue, in Diderot's contributions to the *Encyclopédie*. His focus is helpful for understanding just how the logic of taxonomy proves insufficient for Enlightenment science and how Diderot's representations of the body—his poetics of the body—presents an alternative logic, one that was necessary in order for Enlightenment science to be science. The epistemological productivity of Diderot's alternative logic, however, remains at best peripheral within Darnton's focus.

In his description of in-between bodies, Darnton's attention is biased towards the objects classified in the encyclopedic "world of knowledge" that are violent, magical and abhorrent. He characterizes those bodies as the ones that "horrify and fascinate us," the ones that "make our skin crawl because they slip in between categories" (193). It is not surprising, then, that for Darnton the knowledge that results from what lies in between categories of knowledge is incommensurate with order itself. It is knowledge that requires policing, a knowledge whose boundaries are governed by epistemological prohibitions:

All borders are dangerous. If left unguarded, they could break down, our categories could collapse, and our world dissolve in chaos. Setting up categories and policing them is therefore serious business. A philosopher who attempted to redraw the boundaries of the world of knowledge would be tampering with the taboo. Even if he steered clear of sacred objects, he could not avoid danger; for knowledge is inherently ambiguous. Like reptiles and rats, it can slip from one category to another. It has bite. (ibid)

The inclination of Darnton's gaze is a readily available instance of how the contemporary thinker might look upon the Enlightenment. By taking up a point of view which focuses exclusively on the abhorrent nature of the bodies that did not fit neatly into the Enlightenment's categories of the known and the unknown, Darnton helps us to see how we might formulate our own definitions of extraordinary or different bodies. And how we might, as Darnton's peers in the postmodern age, seek alternative van-







tage points with regards to such bodies in order to remain critical of our definitions of them.

The 'slippage' between categories of knowledge, or categories of animals in Darnton's view of the *Encyclopédie* elides an essential feature within its corpus—within those articles authored by Diderot. Again and again, in article after article, Diderot represents in-between bodies, ambiguous animal, plant, mineral and human bodies, and body parts as ordinary, natural, and even categorical elements in the natural order. They are the naturally occurring yet monstrous progenies of the sublime disorder of the natural world.

Slippage or movement from one category to the next, from one realm to the next, from one developmental stage to the next, is indeed the natural course—indeed the natural history—of man for Diderot. That slippage eventually shifts what is natural about natural history away from a strictly scientific exposition towards one that incorporates elements of the poetics—towards elements of fiction. What is in between the categories of science and what is in between science and fiction become in the end more important than the stable categories of the known and of the unknown in the organization of the *Encyclopédie* as a whole.

Early in the article entitled "Homme," Diderot represents the human body in between two natural elements (water and air) and in so doing counters Darnton's bias towards what is strictly dangerous, abhorrent and in need of regulation and even restriction about the in-between bodies of the *Encyclopédie*. "L'homme naissant passe d'un élément dans un autre. Au sortir de l'eau qui l'environnait, il se trouve exposé à l'air; il respire. Il vivait avant cette action; il meurt si elle cesse" (410). Man's passage from embryonic fluid ("l'eau qui l'environnait") to air is the beginning of the life course, or natural history, of the human species. The trickiness of the translation of the expression "l'homme naissant" is indicative here. While we have expressions in English for the process and progress of a man's death ("a dying man") and for the process and progress of giving birth ("a birthing woman"), there is no adequate expression for what is going on here: 'man in birth' or 'birthing man.'<sup>9</sup> What is crucial in this particular passage—the birth passage of Diderot's man—is the *philosophe's* emphasis on the slippery process and pro-

gress of man's birth, an emphasis signaled by Diderot's use of the gerund, *naissant*. That emphasis is important since it presents man's becoming, rather than his essence or being. His birth is an active process that takes place in between the inside and the outside of the woman's body. Man is neither *in vitro* nor *ex vitro* in this passage.

It is useful at this point in my discussion of Diderot's "Homme" to return momentarily to the frontispiece we saw earlier in which the female figures are in the process of incompleting action. The central figure of the allegory, Truth, is in between dress and undress as Reason and Philosophy progressively pull away her veil. Importantly, the gradual unveiling of Truth in which Reason and Philosophy take part will be, if we follow the visual itinerary of unveiling, only a partial one since Truth wears yet another veil discretely wrapped around her hips. Progressive rather than completed action, bodies that are becoming rather than bodies which simply *are*—these are, according to feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray,<sup>10</sup> the traditional and usual bodies of the feminine—the woman's body that figures, for example, immanence, the pre-symbolic or the nonessential. What is unique, then, about Diderot's "Man," at least to the modern eye, is the masculine gendering of a body that is associated with what is in progress, what is slippery, watery and finally disruptive. Diderot's discussion of *birthing man* disrupts the ways in which traditional Enlightenment science gendered bodies by making them incommensurate with one another.

The effects of this disruption become apparent by comparing the central female figure of the *Encyclopédie's* frontispiece with a male figure in another frontispiece by Cochin [FIGURE 2], the one accompanying the *Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, also a contributor to the *Encyclopédie*. A comparison of the two frontispieces allows us to situate Diderot's *birthing man* in the context of what would seem to be the paradigmatic instance of an alternative to the Enlightenment—the work, if not the man, of Rousseau—within the *Encyclopédie* itself. Mark Hulliung has argued in *Autocritique of the Enlightenment* for the possibility of a self-reflexive and self-critical Enlightenment in the figure of the *philosophe* and in the project of the *Encyclopédie*. Hulliung



Figure 2

makes these claims in the interest of 'readmitting' Jean-Jacques Rousseau (who contributed the article "Economie Politique" to the *Encyclopédie* in 1755) into "his cultural habitat, that is, the world of the encyclopedists" (ix). It is important to note, however, that Hulliung's case for a Jean-Jacques *philosophe* is frequently made in terms of Rousseau's similarities to and differences from his "enemy-brother," Diderot.

While it is not possible within the scope of this study to determine whether Rousseau or Diderot is the most critical of the Enlightenment, whatever "autocritique" Rousseau might offer



the Enlightenment from *outside* its cultural habit or from a new position *inside* it, any critique or critical stance with regards to the Enlightenment must be related to Diderot's departures from Enlightenment thought, and specifically his alternative to the general discourse poetics of Enlightenment. My comparison between the frontispiece of the *Encyclopédie* and the one accompanying *Confessions* [FIGURE 2] is of use here for examining the radical alternative at work in Diderot's article "Homme" and in his *Encyclopédie* in general.

In Cochin's frontispiece to the *Confessions* the *mise en scène* of the central male figure, allegorizing Rousseau's natural man, parallels the female figure of Truth in several ways. Natural man is surrounded by beams of light that part the clouds framing the scene. The surrounding secondary figures, peasants (as signaled by their attire and by the bridle in the hands of the seated female figure on the right), are all in a state of repose, not unlike the second tier of figures surrounding Truth. Like Cochin's frontispiece to the *Encyclopédie*, the central figure is also progressively unveiled by two female figures. One of these stands behind the male figure, pulling the veil from his shoulders (just as Reason does so as she stands behind Truth) and the other, dressed in peasant's garb and holding a small dog, stands at his right, pulling the veil away from his arms (just as Philosophy does for Truth). A garlanded and more classically-represented male figure holds a torch and turns his gaze and his stride away from the scene at hand. Like Imagination in the earlier frontispiece, this figure guides the central figure of the engraving.

The opening lines of Rousseau's *Confessions* supplement the frontispiece by guiding the spectator along a visual itinerary portraying the origin or the birth of Rousseau's natural man, his life, and his culmination in a superlative and definitive moment of uniqueness. Of course, that portrait of human life is painted with the broad strokes of allegory and fiction as Rousseau's hyperbolic allusion to his mythological uniqueness indicates:

Voici le seul portrait d'homme, peint exactement d'après la nature et dans toute sa vérité, qui existe et qui probablement existera jamais. Qui que vous soyez que ma destinée ou ma confiance ont fait l'arbitre du sort de ce cahier, je vous conjure par malheurs, par vos entrailles, et au nom de toute l'espèce

humaine de ne pas anéantir un ouvrage unique et utile, lequel peut servir de première pièce de comparaison pour l'étude des hommes. (4)

Moreover, Rousseau's portrait—both here and in Cochin's frontispiece—represents natural man in a poise whose body and whose accoutrements signal two moments in the life of "homme, peint exactement d'après la nature."

The central figure can be read simultaneously along two pictorial registers, one of birth and the other of death. Reading along the first register, the unveiling appears as the birth of natural man into a life lived out away from society, and in particular, the Parisian society of *philosophes* that Rousseau abandoned in 1765. In this reading, the closed eyes of the central figure correspond to those of the newborn described in Diderot's "Homme:" eyes not yet open, eyes still without life and without form. The veil becomes in this view the swaddling clothes of man newborn to natural life, while the figure to his right lights a path that leads him away from the scene of Enlightenment and towards natural life, even towards the new natural history of man.

Reading along the second pictorial register, the unveiling reveals the death of earthly man and his heavenly rebirth. In this second reading, the closed eyes of the central figure correspond to those of man at his Final Judgement. His are eyes soon to be opened to the after-life—the life which follows death and is characterized by bodily transcendence and resurrection. From this perspective, the veil becomes the shroud of man born again through the divine intervention of his Maker. The relatively stable group of figures to the left of natural man correspond to other, newly resurrected bodies of the dead at the occasion of the Rapture. Between each of these registers mediates the event and the idea of birth—the representation of Rousseau's natural man as unique in either the natural or the supernatural order: "Voici le seul portrait d'homme, peint exactement d'après la nature et dans toute sa vérité, qui existe et qui probablement existera jamais." In this respect, birth would seem to operate as a sort of hinge upon which one or the other reading might be made. However, the play of that hinge becomes limited if not arrested

upon closer examination and comparison with Cochin's frontispiece to the *Encyclopédie*.

The two moments and two visual registers in what we might call Rousseau's "newborn man" organize an exposition of natural man that is teleological—it moves towards a clear and definitive end (whether we read that end as life in nature or the after-life) that stabilizes what would otherwise be the suspended animation of the allegory. In contrast, the frontispiece to the 1751 edition of the *Encyclopédie* portrays Enlightenment in the process of becoming Enlightenment with no reference to its final conclusion or stability. Truth, not unlike Diderot's *homme naissant*, is, so to speak, *veritas veritans*.

Cochin's two frontispieces differ, then, not just in their genderings of the central figures of 'Enlightenment,' but in the outcome of Enlightenment itself.<sup>11</sup> In the *Encyclopédie's* allegory or fiction of Enlightenment, knowledge is in between a state of original illumination and ongoing reflection, the sort of liminal state that Diderot reiterates throughout his article "Homme," as my continued analysis of that article will soon show. To read Cochin's frontispiece to the *Encyclopédie* in light of Diderot's unique approach to the ordering of knowledge—specifically the knowledge about man—is to read about knowledge and bodies that lie in between the usual categories of Enlightenment science, and Enlightenment fiction. It is to read an alternative Enlightenment—an alternative or paradoxical Enlightenment present to the most paradigmatic Enlightenment projects of all, the *Encyclopédie*.

The Enlightenment and its paradoxical alternative are elaborated by the events of birth, life, and finally death which would seem to organize the overall exposition and internal logic of Diderot's "Man." In the introduction of the article, Diderot sets up the chronological order and logic for a natural history of man that precedes not in a strictly taxonomical order but in the order of a narration or a fiction—even a science fiction: "On a suivi l'*homme* depuis le moment de sa formation ou de sa vie, jusqu'à l'instant de sa mort. C'est ce qui forme l'histoire naturelle de l'*homme*" (409). This is a genesis or beginning that, not unlike the opening pages of *La Religieuse*, *Le Neveu de Rameau* or *Jacques le fataliste*, is arbitrarily designated.<sup>12</sup> And the termina-

tion or conclusion of man's life is an artificially precise moment, again not unlike the inconclusive denouements of Diderot's novels.<sup>13</sup>

Next, Diderot follows through with an account of man beginning with infancy, passing through puberty or adolescence, and ending with old age.<sup>14</sup> However, Diderot alternates this chronology with passages that disrupt the (overall) consecutive account of events in the history of man's natural history, thereby suspending natural time. He suspends the usual chronology of natural history, interrupting it with what would have to be a fictional account of man's linguistic origins.

It is *before* his account of prenatal life and of infant development that Diderot places a description of original language. The *philosophe* therefore predicates man's passage from life inside the womb to life outside the womb with man's specifically rational and linguistic difference from animals. Language, as Diderot explains, is indicative of that particular characteristic distinguishing man from animals: thought, and specifically, *consecutive* thought: "L'homme communique sa pensée par la parole, & ce signe est commun à tout l'espèce. Si les animaux ne parlent point, ce n'est pas en eux la faute de l'organe de la parole, mais l'impossibilité de *lier des idées*" (410). In the lines that follow, Diderot moves on to describe man, now imbued with language and thought, at his infancy. The *infant*—the one who does not yet speak<sup>15</sup>—as well as the infant's fluid passage from one element to another signal the indistinct and ambivalent state(s) of *l'homme naissant* and of his general development—his body's paradoxical natural history. "Birthing man" is in between fluid and air, in between original language and the language of science, in between blindness and enlightenment.

*L'homme naissant* is at best an ambiguous life form, a slippery body that is neither here nor there in its own history. In this respect *l'homme naissant* is a body best at home not in the natural history exhibit, where, as Diderot tells us in his article "Cabinet d'histoire naturelle," rareties are gathered together independently of nature:

Pour former un *cabinet d'histoire naturelle*, il ne suffit pas de rassembler sans choix, & d'entasser sans ordre & goût, tous les



objets d'histoire naturelle que l'on rencontre; il faut savoir distinguer de ce qu'il faut rejeter, & donner à chaque chose un arrangement convenable. L'ordre d'un *cabinet* ne peut être celui de la nature; la nature affecte partout un désordre sublime. (240)

*L'homme naissant* is indeed most at home in nature, that is, in the sublime disorder of the natural world.

The fluidity of man's movement from one element to another in Diderot's "Man," along with the heterogeneous nature of his body make for the impossibility of the philosopher's simple articulation of the difference between man and animals—his simple rearticulation of the categories contributing to good Enlightenment science, such as natural history. Instead, nature in all its sublime and luxurious disorder gives form to the structure of Diderot's exposition of the history—and the story—he tells in the article "Man." The narrative or allegorical logic of man's history, as equivocal as it is at the moment of his birth, momentarily interjects itself in the logic of taxonomy. Classification and difference, therefore, are supplemented by events that are part and parcel to Diderot's particular account of man's *histoire naturelle*.

Yet as Diderot's account of man's natural history continues, the logic of taxonomy returns. That account, which might otherwise be a narrative exposition of the development of the human body, is punctuated by a return to taxonomical logic. A hierarchy of the senses defers the story of their development, substituting that story with a sense-by-sense account of man's entry into sensory existence, beginning with vision.

The logic of taxonomy intervenes in Diderot's account of the senses but just long enough to point to the still diffident and rudimentary nature of specifically human senses, and of the human body's sense of sight.

La plupart des animaux restent les yeux fermés pendant quelques jours après leur naissance. *L'homme* les ouvre aussitôt qu'il est né; mais ils sont fixes et ternes. Sa prunelle qui a déjà jusqu'à une ligne & demie ou deux de diamètre, s'étrécit ou s'élargit à une lumière plus forte ou plus faible; mais s'il en a le sentiment, il est fort obtus. Sa cornée est ridée; sa rétine



trop molle pour recevoir les images des objets. Il paraît en être de même pour des autres sens. (410)

Born with his eyes open, man, in contrast to animals, begins his life with his most distinguished and distinguishing sense organ—his eyes—in a state of lifelessness. Still, man's eyes, as Diderot goes on to explain, would seem to be the model for the other senses. Vision, and its corresponding body parts, are therefore paradigmatic only in so far as they exemplify the pueril development of man's senses in particular and of his body in general.

Diderot's exposition of "Homme" turns out to be the perpetuation of a back-and-forth movement, a constant tension between, on the one hand, the articulation of categories (the category of rational, speaking man and non-rational, non-speaking animals and infants) and, on the other hand, the narration of man's story—his *histoire naturelle*. The order of man's body, the development of the body's senses, according to the history of man in the article "Homme," is incommensurate with the natural order—incommensurate with life itself. Man, whose first defining characteristic is his sense perception and who is first among the animals, enters the natural order ill-equipped to be man, ill-equipped to be alive. What turns out to be *natural* about man's natural history as Diderot gives an account of that history in "Homme," are its deviations, tangents and digressions within its fiction. The category of man is, at best, an unstable category, one that must be expanded in order to hold within it that slippery, blind and mute body that belongs to him.

Ambiguous bodies, which is to say bodies that fit neatly into neither one category nor another, make up an alternative order drawn out in, and in between, the articles of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. These bodies are not the exceptions or aberrations of this order but the paradigmatic instances and enactments of the laws and paradoxical variety of nature itself: the story of natural man tells of a naturally irregular history. Irregular body forms and body parts are just as necessary and natural in the natural order of things as regular bodies and functional sense organs or body parts. Just as the logic of taxonomy and the logic of natural history enhance one another in "Homme," so irregular and mon-

strous bodies bring one another about, make discernible or sensible, or *sensible*, ordinary and ordered functional bodies.

As Diderot's article "Irrégularité" demonstrates, irregular bodies (those that exceed the rules of taxonomical order) create the lines of demarcation and difference between various types of bodies *in their very departure from natural laws*:

Défaut contre les règles; partout où il y a un système de règles qu'il importe de suivre, il peut y avoir écart de ces règles, & par conséquent *irrégularité*. Il n'y a aucune production humaine qui ne soit susceptible d'*irrégularité*. On peut même quelquefois en accuser les ouvrages de la nature; mais alors il y a deux motifs qui doivent nous rendre très circonspects: la nécessité absolue de ses lois, & la peu de connaissance de sa variété & de son opération. (581)

Departures from the norm (the "système de règles") turn out to be regular events within human production. Irregular bodies are in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* the negative spaces — *les écarts* — that in their contiguous relationship to positive spaces form an image. They lend substance and material to the regular bodies within its taxonomical order, making them perceptible or *sensible*, while generating an entire *genre* or species of their own within those intervals.<sup>16</sup>

The body inhabiting Diderot's article "Anatomie" is positioned in just such a gap or interval between two opposing fields: that of anatomy and that of poetics. The scientific and, specifically, medical nature of the title would seem to announce and anticipate a description and an explanation of a science which, although not a new science, gained over the course of the early and mid-eighteenth century unprecedented status within the medical community and within the institutions of that community.<sup>17</sup> Its title, an oxymoronic tiding of a text in which anatomy per se is discussed seemingly only in passing, announces a highly ambivalent body.

Moreover, "Anatomie" would seem to be at odds not only with the article's content, but with the general project of the *Encyclopédie*. This particular encyclopedic entry hosts a fierce and, we might say, decidedly unenlightened apology on the part of Diderot: his apology for the dissection of the living bodies of criminals.

The content of "Anatomie" is at odds with the science of anatomy as it had come to be practiced by a new generation of *chirurgiens-mâtres*, or master-surgeons, such as Verdier, who taught dissection and anatomy in Paris for twenty-five years, beginning in 1724. Verdier's ingenious and hugely popular innovations in the teaching of anatomy required not living but dead bodies and not one but many bodies for his demonstrations (even bodies of different species).<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to Verdier's practice of comparative anatomy demonstrations, and in contrast to the article "Homme," Diderot seems unusually preoccupied with stabilizing the nature of the human species in the article "Anatomie." He begins with a definition of humanity that is supposed to be obvious since that definition is based upon syllogistic logic.

Qu'est-ce que l'humanité? sinon une disposition habituelle de cœur à employer nos facultés à l'avantage du genre humain. Cela supposé, qu'a d'inhumain la dissection d'un méchant? Puisque vous donnez le nom d'*inhumain* au méchant qu'on dissèque, parce qu'il a tourné contre ses semblables des facultés qu'il devait employer à leur avantage. (363)

As it turns out, Diderot's definition of humanity serves the express purpose of justifying the use of criminals as living subjects in medical experimentation and demonstration. Since criminals are not human because through their crimes they do harm to the human race, and, moreover, since criminals become human only when their bodies are dissected, anatomy is, according to Diderot's logic, a science which makes the inhuman human. It is a *humanizing* science. Diderot gives what is supposed to be the syllogistic definition of humanity only after he asks what will turn out to be not a rhetorical question, but one that eventually upsets the rhetoric and rhetorical logic of his apology: What is inhuman about the dissection of a criminal?

To answer this question Diderot goes on to make a series of analogies between the terms of crime and corporeal punishment on the one hand and the terms of medicine and anatomical demonstration on the other:

De quelque manière qu'on considère la mort d'un méchant, elle serait bien plus utile à la société au milieu d'un am-

phithéâtre que sur une échafaud; & ce supplice serait tout au moins redoutable qu'un autre. Mais il y aurait un moyen de ménager le spectateur, l'anatomiste & le patient: le spectateur & l'anatomiste, en n'essayant sur le patient que des opérations utiles, & dont les suites ne seraient pas évidemment funestes: le patient, en ne le confiant qu'aux hommes les plus éclairés, & en lui accordant la vie s'il réchappait de l'opération particulière qu'on aurait tentée sur lui. (363)

Here the onlooker of the scene of execution is analogous to the spectator ("le spectateur") of the anatomy lesson; the executioner to the anatomy teacher ("l'anatomiste"); the criminal to the patient ("le patient"); and, finally, the execution is analogous to anatomical operations ("des opérations utiles").

Within the now at once disciplinary and anatomical theater, Enlightenment is gained not in the operation itself but in its outcome: "n'y aurait-il pas des occasions où l'on aurait plus de lumières à attendre des suites d'une opération, que de l'opération même?" (ibid). However, what follows is not a description of the time or the observations that might follow the performance in the medical theater. Instead, Diderot lists a total of eleven experiments and surgical procedures which the criminal might prefer to execution: the injection of various fluids into the blood stream, the amputation of a thigh at its joint, the removal of the spleen or of part of the brain, the connection of the mammary and the epigastric arteries, the fracturing of a portion of one or two ribs, the dissection of the intestine, the opening of the oesophagus, and the connection of the vasdeferens (or, spermatic vessels, in Diderot's words) without cutting off its central nerve (363-4).

In making his list of surgical procedures, a strange thing happens in Diderot's "Anatomie." Amidst a myriad of technical and scientific terms, the living body is dehumanized through Diderot's destabilization of the categories of man in "Anatomie," the criminal and the patient.<sup>19</sup> After Diderot mentions the pain involved in any given surgery ("une opération douloureuse") no further reference to the body as the potential site of a feeling, suffering subject is made. It is momentarily overlooked, forgotten in a flourish of medical techniques. In "Anatomie," there is finally no criminal body per se but, instead, a body that is turned inside



out in a textual performance of an anatomical demonstration. The body is put back together but in view of anatomy and in view of what is supposed to be enlightened science.

To state the obvious, but to do so with vigilance towards our potential indifference to the obvious, the science of anatomy needs bodies in order to be good, solid science. Anatomy, that science which confers humanity, and one of the first among those that were to become *les sciences humaines*, is and has been from its first practice, a science conferred its status as science by the human body.

To state what is less obvious, what we might not see if we regard the criminal's body with indifference, Diderot's "Anatomie" is an instance of Enlightenment science whose methodology, procedure and techniques of observation—and whose very order—is predicated upon a poetics of the body that turns that science inside out. The rhetoric of logic and solid argumentation (for instance, Diderot's opening syllogism) loses ground to a rhetoric which figures jurisprudence and medicine, crime and anatomy, in a corporeal site whose insides become its outsides. Yet in turning science inside out, in turning the medical amphitheater into public spectacle, anatomy is made to stand not so much on its own or as its own discipline and practice. Rather the science of anatomy—the science of bodies—in "Anatomie" is made to stand as the paradigmatic instance of Enlightenment science.

Irregular or aberrant bodies within the human species provide a way for the science of anatomy to account for what falls outside its usual scope, even the scope of Verrier's innovative demonstrations. They transform the visual apparatus of the eighteenth-century anatomist from one of taxonomical comparison (for instance the comparison of diverse body parts) to one of taxonomical speculation. In this way anatomy could envision or see its objects of inquiry (however strange or deviant) within the very order of nature, thereby making it possible for anatomical science to be science.<sup>20</sup>

The bodies Diderot represents in the articles, "Homme," "Ir-régularité," "Cabinet d'Histoire Naturelle," and "Anatomie" complicated the taxonomical and epistemological task facing the contributors and, of course, the chief-editor of the *Encyclopédie*.



the task of classifying, cataloguing and otherwise accounting for both regular and irregular bodies. Yet that task demanded not so much abridging or “trimming,” as Darnton has suggested, in order to accomodate those irregular bodies. Instead, it demanded that the disciplinary lines separating natural history from poetics be elaborated in order for the science of Enlightenment to correspond to natural knowledge in all its sublime disorder. What was required was indeed paradoxical: a supplement to the understanding of the known with an epistemological enactment, a learned exposition of the unknown – the *almost* unfathomable – variety of nature. It is perhaps for this reason that Diderot states early in his article, “Encyclopédie:”

Une encyclopédie ne s’ordonne pas. C’est un travail qui veut plutôt être suivi avec opiniâtreté que commencé avec chaleur. Les entreprises de cette nature se proposent dans les cours, accidentellement, & par forme d’entretien; mais elles n’y intéressent jamais assez pour être point oubliées à travers le tumulte & dans la confusion d’une infinité d’autres affaires plus ou moins importantes. (181)

The requisite understanding for creating the *Encyclopédie* was, therefore, an expanded definition of understanding itself. And, indeed it is hard to imagine a philosophical endeavor that would require more obstinance or perserverence or one that would find its inception in other ways – other than the accidental and sometimes blind course of critical and intellectual conversations (“dans les cours, accidentellement, & par forme d’entretien”), or in the artificial and sometimes denaturalizing course of narrative or fiction.

Diderot’s plan to topple and re-erect the epistemological structures both of the past and of the present is discernible in his *Prospectus* and in the sampling of articles I have discussed. In each instance, the *philosophe* reflects upon and enacts a new definition of epistemology that is elaborated and carried on outside the rubrics and categories belonging to science per se. By representing bodies that fall outside the taxonomies of science, the bodies that we might locate on the borders but not neatly within the *doxia* of Enlightenment science, Diderot calls our attention to our own ways of accounting for human and non-hu-

man bodies. Diderot's *Encyclopédie* presents us with the Enlightenment but also the distinctly post-Enlightenment challenge of *seeing* how the bodies we write about, the bodies we teach and study, and even those bodies we deem harmful to human society present an organizing and ordering force that enters into our own history—in all its luxurious and sublime disorder.

Dianah Leigh Jackson is an Acting Assistant Professor of French and Italian Studies at the University of Washington.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Philosophy is, in both Diderot's *Prospectus* and in d'Alembert's *Discours Préliminaire*, synonymous with science. Moreover, it is the overarching rubric that comprises the various sciences in the *système détaillé des connaissances*. So when in my study I refer to Enlightenment "philosophy" I am also referring to Enlightenment "science."

<sup>2</sup> D'Alembert's *Discours préliminaire* to the *Encyclopédie* reiterates the general poetics of light and enlightenment, while placing emphasis upon the figure of *réflexion*:

La philosophie, ou la portion de la connaissance humaine qu'il faut rapporter à la raison, est très étendue. Il n'est presque aucun objet aperçu par les sens, dont la réflexion n'ait fait science." (166, my emphasis)

According to D'Alembert, reason/reflection is both the process by which the mind fixes on objects (apperception or the basic process of cognition) and the phenomenon of light falling upon and bouncing off surfaces. In much the same way that Reason in Cochin's drawing extends itself in order to reveal Truth, reason in the *Discours* extends itself in nature in a vast and comprehensive way in order to provide enlightenment to philosophy—in order to make science. For D'Alembert of the *Discours* and Cochin of the *Encyclopédie's* frontispiece, reason (Reason) functions therefore as a reflective medium: the medium or means by which objects become the objects of Enlightenment philosophy or science. Reason is the surface which reflects light (once exposed to Truth) and in doing so produces Enlightenment.

<sup>3</sup> The natural order, as it is first defined by Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon in his *Histoire naturelle* and then elaborated by Diderot, is a taxonomic order. Importantly, Buffon is second only to Johann Jakob Brucker, a historian of philosophy, as the most quoted author in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. Buffon's taxonomies function as the general outline for several of Diderot's articles, such as "Homme" and, especially, "Animal." In "Homme," for instance, Diderot adopts a style of pastiche in which he paraphrases Buffon's reflections on man in his "Histoire naturelle de l'homme." However, in "Animal," he alternates lengthy, direct quotations from Buffon's *Histoire* with Diderot's interventions. Both means of citation, whether indirect or direct, indicate the importance of the taxonomical order belonging to natural history as an organizing tool, but also as a point of departure for Diderot's critical approach to Enlightenment science and philosophy. The taxonomical order of the *Encyclopédie*, and of Buffon's *Histoire*







*naturelle* originated contemporaneously with the reordering of the discipline of the history of philosophy. Represented by Bayle, Fontenelle, Bruckner, Formey, and Meslier, the history of philosophy of the mid-eighteenth century was based upon the comparison of systems of thought and systems of belief. In a more general sense the discipline of eighteenth-century comparative philosophy provided two important models for ordering the articles of the *Encyclopédie* and its accompanying branches of the Trees of Understanding: first, the refusal to assign any given system of thought or any given belief system a privileged position or 'trunk' in the history of philosophy, and, second, the insistence upon the teleology or progress of that history (and the coincident history of the human spirit) towards "the light." The *telos* towards enlightenment that marks the organization and procedure of the *Encyclopédie* is derived from the general orientation of Johann-Jacob Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae a mundi incunabulis ad nostram usque aetatem deducia*. As Jacques Proust explains in his discussion of "L'Histoire de la philosophie de Pierre Bayle à Jacob Bruckner" in *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie*: "Cette histoire est pourtant orientée, car elle est l'histoire même de l'esprit humain; arraché aux ténèbres, il s'est peu à peu élevé vers la lumière et vers la vérité; la connaissance de ses progrès, de ses reculs, voire de ses erreurs doit lui permettre d'aller plus loin encore, aussi loin qu'il peut aller" (245).

<sup>4</sup> Diderot makes clear the encyclopedic demand for this equilibrium in the *Prospectus*:

In order to stand up beneath the weight of our project, it was necessary to share it between us; and right away we looked toward a sufficient number of scholars and artists; able artists well-known for their talents; scholars of particular specializations to whom we conferred their particular tasks. We distributed to each of these the part that befitted him....in this way each one, having only to take charge of what he knew, was able to judge sanely what the Ancients and the Moderns have written, and to add knowledge drawn from his own resources to the help that they provide. (92-3)

<sup>5</sup> My reading of the excessive expression of "luxe" in Diderot's "Encyclopédie" borrows from Derrida's discussion of the word "usure" in the opening paragraphs of the chapter, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> "Although all elements of Cartesian attitude toward vision were not abandoned in eighteenth-century France—residues are evident in figures as diverse as Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu and Denis Diderot—they were fighting a losing battle with the more uncompromising sensationalism that gained ascendancy in the late Enlightenment. Still, what must be emphasized is the tacit communication of an oculcentric bias during the *siècle des lumières*." (*Downcast Eyes*, 85)

<sup>7</sup> Diderot's clearest articulation of his theory of sight is in his *Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient*. In the *Lettre* (which predates his work as editor of the *Encyclopédie* by two years) Diderot is in large part an apology on the role of the body and all of its senses in the practice and methodologies of philosophy and science. The very title of Diderot's *Lettre* initiates that critique by pairing blind bodies with sighted bodies in useful correspondence, in a letter. Moreover the title indicates what will become Diderot's general departure from an Enlightenment propensity to articulate the methods and procedures of rational thought through the tropics of vision and towards a science whose primary and privileged figure is a body imbued with all senses, including impaired senses or the vestiges of senses organs.

<sup>8</sup> See especially Darnton's *The Business of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> In medical terms, the available expressions are equally inadequate: the baby 'is delivered' (a strange turn of events since the mother does the delivering), or 'traverses the birth canal' (just one moment in the myriad of events making up birth that is in fact impossible to isolate).

<sup>10</sup> My references here are to Simone de Beauvoir's monumental discussion of immanence and transcendence in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Julia Kristeva's definition and thematization of "chora" in both her "Sabat Mater" in *Histoires d'amour* and her article "Chora," and to Luce Irigaray's meditation upon an evolution towards "une féminité" in *Speculum de l'autre femme*.

<sup>11</sup> That outcome must be read, nonetheless, in terms of the larger context of gendered, encyclopedic and enlightened bodies, a reading that I take up in my study of Diderot's *La Religieuse*.

<sup>12</sup> The opening lines of each of these novels merits citation given the remarkably incomplete nature of Diderot's beginnings. Each one announces the narrative to follow in the middle of an action whose

origin, cause or genesis remains unaccounted. (All citations are from Denis Diderot's *Oeuvres Complètes* [Paris: Hermann, 1987.])

"Zima, profitez du moment. L'aga Narkis entretient votre mère, et votre gouvernement guette sur un balcon le retour de votre père: prenez, lisez, ne craignez rien." (*Les Bijoux indiscrets* 32)

"La réponse de M. le marquis de Croismare, s'il m'en fait une, fournira les premières lignes de ce récit." (*La Religieuse* 81)

"Qu'il fasse beau, qu'il fasse laid, c'est mon habitude d'aller sur les cinq heures du soir me promener au Palais Royal." (*Le Neveu de Rameau* 69)

"Comment s'étaient-ils rencontrés? Par hasard, comme tout le monde. Comment s'appelaient-ils? Que vous importe? D'où venaient-ils? Du lieu le plus prochain. Où allaient-ils? Est-ce que l'on sait où on va?" (*Jacques le fataliste* 23)

<sup>13</sup> Again, the conclusions which remain inclusive in Diderot's novels call for citation:

"N'est-il pas vrai que nous ne sommes que des marionnettes? -- Oui. quelquefois." (*Les Bijoux indiscrets* 281)

Ici les mémoires de la sœur Suzanne sont interrompus; ce qui suit ne sont plus que les réclames de ce qu'elle se promettait apparemment d'employer dans le reste de son récit. (*La Religieuse* 275)

LUI : Rira bien qui rira le dernier. (*Le Neveu de Rameau* 196)

"S'il est écrit là-haut que tu seras cocu, Jacques, tu auras beau faire, tu le seras; s'il est écrit au contraire que tu ne le seras pas, ils auront beau faire, tu ne le seras pas; dors donc, mon ami..." et qu'il s'endormait. (*Jacques le fataliste* 291)

<sup>14</sup> As it happens, Diderot's story beginning with infancy ("Nous ne commençons son histoire qu'après le moment de sa naissance" 410), passing through puberty ("La puberté accompagne l'adolescence & précède la jeunesse" 413) and ending with old age ("le corps s'incline vers la terre à laquelle il doit retourner. Les premières nuances de cet état se font apercevoir avant quarante ans" 421) finds its illustration in a set of engravings by Cochin: "L'Enfance," "L'Adolescence," "L'Âge Viril," and "La Vieillesse." It is significant that Cochin's inscriptions of man's body throughout his history actually includes one chapter in that (his)tory left out by Diderot, "L'Âge Viril."

<sup>15</sup> The word "infant" comes from the Latin: *in*, "not" and *fans*, the present participle of *fari*, to speak.

<sup>16</sup> In "Encyclopédie" Diderot meditates at length upon the potential omissions in the *Dictionnaire's* taxonomy. These omissions correspond not so much to an absence or lack as to the in-between genre of irregular bodies. What is interesting in Diderot's meditation in "Encyclopédie" is that such omissions demonstrate the epistemological and metaphysical limitation of productive absence:

Il n'y a rien d'existant dans la nature ou dans l'entendement...qui ne tienne par un grand nombre de fils au système général de la connaissance humaine. Si au contraire la chose omise était importante, pour que l'omission n'en fût ni aperçue ni réparée, il faudrait supposer au moins une seconde omission, qui en entraînerait au moins une troisième, & ainsi de suite, jusqu'à un être solitaire, isolé et placé sur les dernières limites du système. Il y aurait un ordre entier d'êtres ou de notions supprimé, ce qui est métaphysiquement impossible. (229)

In order to account therefore for the irregular bodies of the "Cabinet d'histoire naturelle," an alternative to metaphysics and not just to Enlightenment is required.

<sup>17</sup> The teaching of anatomy and its status of a legitimate science within the medical community must be understood within the context of the opposition, on the part of doctors (*les médecins*), to the liberal education of surgeons, throughout the early part of the eighteenth century. The first anatomical amphitheater was constructed in 1699 at Saint-Côme, under the auspices of the medical community. The 1724 royal letter patents created five surgical professorships at Saint-Côme. Then in 1731 the *Académie royale de la chirurgie* was formed, creating a de facto separation of doctors and surgeons (the latter called, "chirurgiens and perruquiers"), a separation rendered de jure in 1743 with Louis XV's royal decree. At the beginning of Turgot's ministry, in 1776, physical facilities and staff were provided for the first teaching college of surgery, *l'Hôspice*. The *Hôspice* along with the *Académie royale de la chirurgie* were dissolved in 1792, and a new surgical amphitheater was constructed at the *Observatoire* in 1788. Diderot writes his article, "Anatomie," during the on-going disputes between doctors and surgeons, during what came to be known as "*les contestations*" which lasted from 1750 to 1760.

<sup>18</sup> Antoine Louis' 1759 eulogy of Verdier before the *Académie Royale de Chirurgie* and published in the *Académie's Mémoires* (Paris: Didot, 1761) provides a detailed description of his demonstration technique:

La dissection exacte des parties laissées avec leurs attaches principales dans la vraie situation, pour faire connaître leurs rapports; les mêmes parties tirées d'un autre sujet, afin d'en faire voir les différentes faces et contours; des préparations fraîches et sèches, avec les vaisseaux injectés ou sans injection, pour en dévoiler la structure intime; des pièces d'anatomie comparée; des planches multipliées pour chaque objet, parmi lesquelles il y en avait où les parties les plus fines étaient représentées en grand, d'après les observations microscopiques; enfin, tout ce qui pouvait donner les notions les plus précises et les plus sûres était présentés aux yeux de ses auditeurs. (46)

<sup>19</sup> Diderot's destabilizing of the nature of the human species in "Homme" is indicative of the antimimetic character of the *Encyclopédie's* plates. Daniel Brewer's eloquent study of the plates in *The Discourse of Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) stresses their importance as representative and indeed performative of an Enlightenment technology that effectively "screened" or "filtered out" what was invisible or superlative within the production process. In this way the plates take on a decidedly antimimetic and antireferential character as they display, in the words of Brewer, "a process of production (of objects and knowledge) rather than some exterior reality" (29).

<sup>20</sup> Verdier subscribed to the view held by the *Académie des sciences* that surgery had attained its intellectual fulfillment. Again, as Louis tells us in his eulogy of Verdier: "L'anatomie paraissait à M. Verdier un champ beaucoup plus vaste par la multitude des choses qu'il faut connaître que par les nouvelles lumières que l'on y peut porter" (48).



# "XX + XX = XX": Monique Wittig's Reproduction of the Monstrous Lesbian

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*Julie Scanlon*

## Introduction

The genetic equation of my title is taken from Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* (128), and this paper investigates Wittig's deployment of the body and language in the "lesbianization" of the text. Through close textual analysis I explore the dynamics of bodily and linguistic power at work between the protagonists, demonstrating that conflict is prevalent and that power positions are not pre-ordained. A wider discursive form of power relations will then be analyzed, showing the variant forms of authoritative discourses which Wittig employs to expose the registers of medicine, religion and myth to be in conflict with one another and subject to de-hierarchization. Wittig's lesbianization of these dominant discourses dislocates their claims to authority. She manipulates discourses to produce a trope of the lesbian body embracing multiplicity and flux. My conclusion recognizes the problematics of Wittig's reworking of the concept of the lesbian as inclusive in relation to "real" lesbian identities, for which specificity has generally remained essential, whilst not discounting the political force of Wittig's work.

Before discussing *The Lesbian Body* in particular, it is vital to comprehend Wittig's use of the word "lesbian." The terminology she uses to describe lesbians replicates and exaggerates that promoted by the heterosexual patriarchal order. For example, her collection, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, is infused with direct references to lesbians as "not women," "for 'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems" (32). Elsewhere, Wittig describes the lesbian as "a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society," as "run-

aways, fugitive slaves," "standing at the outposts of the human," "located philosophically (politically) beyond the categories of sex" (*The Straight Mind* 13, 45, 46, 47). These provocative descriptions are used positively by Wittig because this neo-human position "represents historically and paradoxically the most human point of view" (*The Straight Mind* 46). Indeed, the power of the lesbian is unique:

[L]esbianism provides for the moment the only social form in which we can live freely. Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. (*The Straight Mind* 20)

Wittig is a severe critic of what she sees as the artifice of the categories of sex, the division between sex and gender being irrelevant, as she views both as ideological machinations. Her conceptualization of the lesbian possesses some surprising similarities to the work of perhaps the most contentious and well-known theorist of sexual difference: Luce Irigaray.<sup>1</sup> In a manoeuvre similar to that of Irigaray in reformulating a position from which women can speak, Wittig deploys hyperbole, parody and humor to redefine from the lesbian point of view the position already ascribed to the lesbian by the mainstream order. Unlike Irigaray's, however, Wittig's concept of difference is not based on sex or gender. The lesbian becomes a trope for the ambivalent monster excluded from the heterosexual system. It is worth noting here that Wittig's disavowal of the categories of sex and gender divorces her from notions of "feminine writing" or *écriture féminine*, as she states: "one makes a mistake in using and giving currency to this expression," for it evokes the myth of "Woman" which is "an imaginary formation" (*The Straight Mind* 59).

Turning to *The Lesbian Body* itself, the text's appearance demarcates it as unconventional in literary terms. Structurally, the text consists of fragments of frequently poetic prose, of approximately a page in length, separated both semantically and typographically from one another. These are interspersed with eleven lists, primarily of body parts and emissions, differentiated

from the prose segments by their large bold capital letters. The prose segments are self-contained descriptions of scenes or events in no apparent linear order. They are narrated in the first person present tense, and predominantly take the form of an address by a focalizer to an addressee. It is unclear whether this couple is the same couple throughout the segments, or whether the narrator is consistent, as the protagonists are not given names, and there is no uniformity of characterization. Neither is agency stable: at times the addressee is the active participant, at times the passive. These strategies defy conventional literary categorization of the work into a "novel" and confuse concepts of "character" and "plot."

Such characteristics force the critic to employ a different vocabulary in order to refer to *The Lesbian Body*. The critical terminology I shall be using must be imagined in inverted commas, since it is not completely satisfactory and does not convey the full potential of Wittig's project. The word "novel" does not apply to a work such as this which distorts features of the novel genre, such as plot, character, and narrative. Instead, I shall refer to the work as "text," although with reservations, as this does not incorporate the visually disruptive elements of the work. Some critics have referred to the non-list sections as "poems," but I find this problematic, as the label again seems reductive and inaccurate.<sup>2</sup> The prose segments are discrete units of description, usually of a particular scene or event. They are separate from one another and yet build up a picture of life on an island apparently inhabited only by women. My use of the term "prose segment" conveys this feeling of simultaneous inclusion in, and yet separation from a larger scheme. Wittig's text also discourages the word "character," since there is little characterization in the form of giving names, in attributing specific characteristics or in consistency of behavior. The reader is never sure if the first person speaker is identical in each segment, or if there are two or more speakers, or whether the addressee remains constant or is different. The term "protagonist" seems more fitting, not in its literary sense of meaning "central character," but to be used equally of all participants in Wittig's text.

The problems associated with vocabulary for the critic of *The Lesbian Body* underlie a larger scale barrier concerning the dogmatic rationalization which the critic is encouraged to bring to her/his argument and perhaps impose upon the text. Discussing such a fragmented text in terms of a whole is problematic and contrary to the text's substance. Concomitantly, discussing the fragments as isolated components is equally misleading. The critic is left with no option but to use Wittig's own devices of maintaining a balanced relationship between viewing the segments both as discrete units and as part of an integrated totality. I have attempted to maintain this balance in my investigation of Wittig's deployment of the body and language in the creation of a position for a lesbian speaking subject. This has tended to result in very detailed analyses of relatively small portions of the text to unravel the intricate weaving of the language. This approach has proved to be the most fruitful way of understanding the text and its operational mode. From these detailed analyses stem more general implications which nevertheless substantiate the text's multiplicity, without, I hope, being too reductive.

A further difficulty arises for a non-native speaker such as myself, in analyzing a text in translation which is so overtly concerned with linguistic manipulation and subtleties. Just as many translated works are prefaced by the translators' recording of the problems and limitations of their project, so an analysis of such works must begin with acknowledging the difficulties of its trajectory. However, like the translator who is not deterred by those problems, but perhaps even fascinated and partially motivated by them, the critic of the translated work cannot be defeated on the grounds of the futility of being able to uncover, or even being aware of, what has been "lost" in translation. The relationship between the texts and the ethics of the project are subjects for another paper, and are not of major concern here. For our purposes, the benefits of translating a work and of studying that translation far outweigh the disadvantages of being unable to access a text. As to *The Lesbian Body*, the fact that one of its central tenets is to defamiliarize language and create a subject position from which the lesbian can speak her experience poses a challenge to its translator, David Le Vay. Le Vay's position as "an



eminent practicing anatomist and surgeon, [who] has abandoned any male chauvinism long enough to translate this book," is one of privileged knowledge of the medical terminology which Wittig frequently employs, and also a position of privilege with regard to language and subject position. The above quotation from Margaret Crosland's introduction to the Beacon edition is a self-consciously ironic testimony to this (7). Again, I do not wish to dwell upon the possible tensions between Le Vay's own position and Wittig's project, but merely to note their existence.

Wittig's text also challenges the translator, the publisher and the reader on the issue of representing language in typed form, most noticeably in respect of splitting the first person pronouns and possessive adjectives: "j/e," "m/on," "m/oi" etc. The English version can replicate the split in pronouns such as "m/y" and "m/e," but encounters difficulties with "I" by simply italicizing it throughout. Crosland states in her introduction that "the typographical implausibility of splitting our English monosyllabic 'I' is obvious" (7). Critics have questioned this "implausibility" existing in "our" language: Emily Culpepper suggesting that a crossed "I," one with a line drawn through it, would fittingly resemble a broken or cut phallus (Daly 327).<sup>3</sup> In quotations I shall be using the italicized "I" to remain faithful to the English publication, but fully concur with Culpepper's observations. Of course, this debate takes place primarily with regard to visual representation, as orally and aurally the words are pronounced and heard without disruption. This substantiates Wittig's presentation of the literary text as "The Site of Action," the title of one of her essays expanding on literature's function (*The Straight Mind* 90-100). The centrality of the pronouns to Wittig's project of lesbianization is described by her thus:

The bar in the j/e of *The Lesbian Body* is a sign of excess. A sign that helps to imagine an excess of "I," an "I" exalted. "I" has become so powerful in *The Lesbian Body* that it can attack the order of heterosexuality in texts and assault the so-called love, the heroes of love, and lesbianize them, lesbianize the symbols, lesbianize the gods and goddesses, lesbianize the men and the women. (*The Straight Mind* 87)



Ambiguity is certainly central to the identities of the protagonists. Martha Noel Evans reads the protagonists of *The Lesbian Body* as the same couple throughout, but Jean H. Duffy is more accurate, I would suggest, in her remarks that "a traditional plot- or character-based interpretation [is neither] fruitful [n]or apt. ... The trials and tribulations of a single, identifiable couple hold no interest" for Wittig (Evans 187, Duffy 225). Instead, Duffy continues, the lovers "are representative figures who are constantly adopting, dropping and qualifying the multiple poses and personae of love" (225). Although the singular "I" and "you" of the text may be representative of multiple stances, grammatically they are used as singular and in dialogue with each other in a power-charged dynamic. Namascar Shaktini's data suggests that the protagonists rarely act together or share experiences, confounding interpretations or expectations of the text as depicting a harmonious community (*The Problem of Subjectivity*, Appendix B B1-B4). She identifies 3,284 first-person singular pronouns and adjectives and 2,712 second-person singular pronouns and adjectives, in contrast to 180 first-person and second-person plural pronouns and adjectives. Intrinsic to the pronoun "I" or "j/e" is this ambiguity of singular and collective which, as I shall demonstrate below, is perpetuated on the corporeal plane.

### Corporeal and Linguistic Conflict

The destabilizing of categories by the narrative style is co-extensive with the unsettling of bodily boundaries. The lesbiанизation produces a monsterring not only of the text but also of the body, as Wittig's protagonists at times incorporate one another, expel one another, tear each other, spill into each other, and metamorphose into or from animals or landscapes. The simultaneous singularity and plurality of Wittig's lesbian body, coupled with the dissolution of its boundaries, reflects a concern regarding the relationship between the bodily boundaries and society which is found in the work of theorists (from disparate disciplines) such as Mary Douglas, Susan Bordo, Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin. Mary Douglas's anthropological work has identified the role the individual body plays as a symbol for the body of society, so that when, for example, social boundaries are

threatened, physical bodily boundaries are elevated and secretions viewed as pollutants (124). Susan Bordo's more recent work reinforces Douglas's observations with regard to contemporary western society's regulation of the female body in its pedestalization of slenderness, suggesting that body boundaries come under scrutiny at times of gender role conflict (185-212). Julia Kristeva's work on abjection discusses the central nature of the regulation of individual bodily boundaries in the constitution of identity. Kristeva suggests that the child becomes aware that the effluences of the body must be controlled and the maternal rejected as it undergoes sphincter training by the mother figure prior to its taking up its position in the social and symbolic order (71-73). Although the focus of the work of these theorists is quite different, each illustrates the recognition of the significant role which the construction of the body and its boundaries plays in the maintenance of social order. The bodies of *The Lesbian Body*, in their repetitive exaggerated spillages and effluences, are emblems of disorderly disruption not only on the individual level but on the level of the society in which they operate. In the introduction to *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin's discussion of the subversive potential of the grotesque body as a process of becoming—incompleteness and disorderliness—substantiates the appropriateness of Wittig's bodies to their function in the text. Wittig's reproduction of the ambiguously bounded body as a site of conflict demonstrates her recognition of the body as a forceful subversive device and her appropriation of this bodily function for her own purpose. Wittig's lesbian body is always already outside and nonhuman in her own terms and therefore a pre-manufactured site of social and ideological conflict.

The instances of bodily dissolution pervade the text and here my discussion entails only representative examples. The following quotation demonstrates the fragility of bodily boundaries when the addressor painstakingly peels away the skin of the addressee to reveal the contents of the skull: "[n]ow m/y fingers bury themselves in the cerebral convolutions, ... m/y hands are plunged in the soft hemispheres, I seek the medulla and the cerebellum tucked in somewhere underneath" (*The Lesbian Body* 17). Both incorporation and metamorphosis are evident in a further segment where the addressor sets about eating the ad-

dressee and we are given an intricate description from the tongue moistening the helix of the ear to the crushing of the bones, to journeying inside the ear to enter the mouth:

*I make an opening into the maxilla, I study the interior of your cheek, I look at you from inside yourself, I lose m/yself, I go astray, I am poisoned by you who nourish m/e, I shrivel, I become quite small, now I am a fly, I block the working of your tongue, vainly you try to spit m/e out, you choke, I am a prisoner, I adhere to your pink and sticky palate, I apply m/y suckers to your delicious uvula. (The Lesbian Body 24)*

This example concisely illustrates several characteristic features of the text. Firstly, it is ambivalent who is incorporating whom, and with whom the power lies. Secondly, the quasi-sexual tone of the language of intrusion and surrender is paramount throughout the text. Thirdly, the sadomasochistic implications are also frequently in evidence. Finally and importantly, the example does not explicitly refer to the sex of the protagonists, indicative of Wittig's politically motivated disregard for the categories of sexual difference.

Wittig explores the manner in which the body and language are used as forces of oppression and subversion. This is particularly well demonstrated in the segment cited in full below. The contradictions of representing an embodied lesbian speaking subject are in evidence:

*I start to tremble without being able to stop, you m/y iniquitous one m/y inquisitress you do not release m/e, you insist that I talk, fear grips m/e m/y hair is shaken, the soft hemispheres of m/y brain the dura mater the cerebellum move within m/y cranium, m/y tongue uvula jaws quiver, I cannot keep m/y lips closed, m/y teeth chatter, m/y arteries throb in furious jerks in m/y neck groins heart, m/y eyes are compressed by their orbits, m/y intestines lurch, m/y stomach turns over, the movement spreads to all m/y muscles, the trapezii deltoids pectorals adductors sartorii the internals the externals are all shaken by spasms, the bones of m/y legs knock against each other when you do not steady them you wretch, there is a prodigious acceleration of movement to the point where freed from gravity I rise up, I maintain m/yself at your eye-level, then you m/y most infamous one you chase m/e*

brutally while *I* fall speechless, you hunt m/e down m/y most fierce one, you constrain m/e to cry out, you put words in m/y mouth, you whisper them in m/y ear and *I* say, no mistress, no for pity's sake, do not sell m/e, do not put m/e in irons, do not make m/y eyeballs burst, deign to call off your dogs, *I* beg you, spare m/e for just a moment longer. (*The Lesbian Body* 27)

This segment depicts the effects on the addressor's body of the addressee attempting to force her to speak seemingly against her will, "you insist that *I* talk." The addressor describes her bodily reactions, both internal and external, in detail as being manipulated into spasms and throbbings under the influence of the addressee. An analysis of the syntax of the segment shows that the transitivity choices, who is doing what to whom, parallel the sense of the addressor being subject to the control of the addressee.<sup>4</sup> Seven of the verb phrases have the first person "*I*" as the subject, and seven have the addressee "you" as the subject. Of those which take the first person singular as the subject, four of them have material consequences and are intended by the subject. These are known as material action intention processes, which in this case are "*I* rise up," "*I* maintain m/yself," "*I* say," and "*I* beg." Three of those which take the first person singular as subject have an external cause and are known as material action supervision processes: "*I* start to tremble," "*I* cannot keep m/y lips closed," and "*I* fall speechless." Each of the seven verb phrases which takes the addressee as subject is material action intention, for example "you insist" and "you chase." In this respect, it can be seen that the addressee is in a stronger position of control than the addressor, as all of her actions are reported as intentional. The perspective is that of the addressor and, therefore, it is her perception that the addressee is in control and this perspective is transferred to the reader. The reader is dependent on the addressor being a reliable source and the character of the addressor is obviously not impartial. The addressee is in control of her own actions and those of the addressor, since the agent of supervision in the addressor's actions seems to be the addressee. The types of verbs used are indicative of power, as are their positions in the segment. For example, the slavery imagery becomes more explicit toward the end of the segment, with the



addressor calling the addressee "mistress," and begging not to be sold or put in irons. Concomitantly there is an increase in the second person singular pronoun as subject, "you chase m/e," "you hunt m/e," "you constrain m/e," "you put words in m/y mouth" and "you whisper them." The first three of these verb phrases portray particularly forceful actions in contrast to the weaker "I maintain," "I say" and "I beg" of the addressor in the same final third of the segment.

Having previously fallen "speechless," the addressor has words put in her mouth by the addressee:

[Y]ou put words in m/y mouth, you whisper them in m/y ear and I say, no mistress, no for pity's sake, do not sell m/e, do not put m/e in irons, do not make m/y eyeballs burst, deign to call off your dogs, I beg you, spare m/e for just a moment longer. (27)

The addressee has succeeded in forcing the addressor to speak, yet the speaker is merely beseeching the addressee to have mercy. To speak here is to be enslaved, to become subject to the control of the other. Although the words spoken are in supplication, the act of speaking signifies a victory for the addressee, and the addressor remains powerless. The significance of this act is multilayered. The addressor, of course, is the one who is speaking to the addressee, the one who is speaking the whole of this segment to her. Even when she falls "speechless," the addressor is telling the addressee she is doing so. This is due to the text being recounted in the present tense and taking the form of an address throughout the book. If the act of speech indicates enslavement, as this instance suggests, are we to assume the whole segment is spoken by one who is enslaved? This imagery of enslavement through language which is not one's own ("you put words in m/y mouth") is a fitting depiction of lesbians or women being forced to speak in the language of mainstream patriarchy. Wittig has made the connection between women and slaves elsewhere: "The perennality of the sexes and the perennality of slaves and masters proceed from the same belief, and, as there are no slaves without masters, there are no women without men" (*The Straight Mind* 2). The protagonist's aim to remain silent suggests



that she will not be forced into using a language which is not her own. The "community of equals" which Evans identifies is clearly not evident in this extract (206). Instead, the protagonists are in conflict with one another. Wittig might be seen as drawing in a representative for patriarchal heterosexuality in her depiction of the "mistress"/slave relationship in this extract, but in the fictional world of the text these participants are individuals inhabiting the island upon which the events take place.

This example has the power in the hands of the addressee, but just as frequently it is in the hands of the addressor, illustrated in a segment where the addressor lovingly pieces together the body of the other (*The Lesbian Body* 112-3). The segment which I cite below has both protagonists apparently under the influence of some power greater than themselves. The image depicted is that of the addressor and addressee being drawn down together into sand. As their immersion is almost complete, their bodies split and start to become fused with one another as they are about to die:

We descend directly legs together thighs together arms entwined m/y hands touching your shoulders your shoulders held by m/y hands breast against breast open mouth against open mouth, we descend slowly. The sand swirls round our ankles, suddenly it surrounds our calves. It's from then on that the descent is slowed down. At the moment your knees are reached you throw back your head, *I* see your teeth, you smile, later you look at m/e you speak to m/e without interruption. Now the sand presses on the thighs. *I* shiver with gooseflesh, *I* feel your skin stirring, your nails dig into m/y shoulders, you look at m/e, the shape of your cheeks is changed by the greatest concern. The engulfment continues steadily, the touch of the sand is soft against m/y legs. You begin to sigh. When *I* am sucked down to m/y thighs *I* start to cry out, in a few moments *I* shall be unable to touch you, m/y hands on your shoulders your neck will be unable to reach your vulva, anguish grips m/e, the tiniest grain of sand between your belly and mine can separate us once for all. But your fierce joyful eyes shining hold m/e against you, you press m/y back with your large hands, *I* begin to throb in m/y eyelids *I* throb in m/y brain, *I* throb in m/y thorax, *I* throb in m/y belly, *I* throb in m/y clitoris while you speak faster and faster clasping m/e

*I clasp you clasp each other with a marvellous strength, the sand is round our waists, at a given moment your skin splits from throat to pubis, m/ine in turn from below upwards, I spill m/yself into you, you mingle with m/e m/y mouth fastened on your mouth your neck squeezed by m/y arms, I feel our intestines uncoiling gliding among themselves, the sky darkens suddenly, it contains orange gleams, the outflow of the mingled blood is not perceptible, the most severe shuddering affects you affects m/e both together, collapsing you cry out, I love you m/y dying one, your emergent head is for m/e most adorable and most fatal, the sand touches your cheeks, m/y mouth is filled.* (*The Lesbian Body* 51-52)

The agent attributed the most power in this segment is that of the sand which is engulfing the couple as they are dragged down into it. The segment begins with a balanced sentence in terms of semantics and linguistics in which the closeness of the couple foreshadows the literal fusing of their bodies towards the end of the segment. The syntactic parallelism of the beginning and end of the sentence, "we descend directly" and "we descend slowly," emphasizes the enclosure of the couple. At this stage it might seem that the couple are intending to descend, as no external agent is introduced to suggest otherwise. It is only on reading the next two sentences that the reader realizes that it is as a result of the sand engulfing them that their descent is slowed down, and that semantically the couple is being enclosed by the sand as linguistically the syntax of the first sentence suggested enclosure, "[t]he sand swirls round our ankles, suddenly it surrounds our calves. It's from then on that the descent is slowed down" (*The Lesbian Body* 52). Any illusion of power which the couple has in the first sentence is thus quashed.

Transitivity choices throughout the segment illuminate where the power lies linguistically. Sixteen of the verb phrases take a subject other than the protagonists or their body parts, and seven of these are directly attributed to the sand. "You" is the subject of twelve verb phrases, all of which are material action intention processes. The body parts of the addressee are the subject of six verb phrases, all of which are material action supervention. "I" is the subject of fourteen verb phrases, four of which are superventional, one intentional and nine mental. Six

take the body parts of the speaker as subject, all superventional. Three take "we" as their subject, two superventional and one intentional. There are far more verb phrases which take inanimate subjects in this section than in the previous one analyzed. The addressee would still appear to be in control of her actions with all of her material actions being intentional. However, exactly half of these "actions" are those of looking at or speaking to the addressor. The physical actions she performs are of small movements often to comfort the addressor, for example, "you ... hold m/e," "you press m/y back," "you ... clasping m/e" and "you mingle with m/e." Only one of the verb phrases with the first person singular as the subject is a material action intention: "*I* clasping you." The addressor is in a weaker position linguistically than the addressee here as before, but both protagonists remain subject to external forces. This is further indicated by the use of the words and phrases "suddenly" and "at a given moment," where some force has predetermined when events occur.

To conclude this section, therefore, Wittig's text shows power being distributed in different times and places to various agents. Her text dislocates power from one central source, which contrasts to the way she views the patriarchal heterosexual order where the heterosexual male has constructed an identity which is all-powerful and self-perpetuating. The juxtaposition of short segments whereby the power dynamics alter from one to another, and even intrinsically, exemplifies the transitory nature of power in the text. It is essential for Wittig's project of de-categorization that power relations are not finite and that there is no ossification of hierarchies. The society Wittig depicts, and the means of depicting it, celebrates flux, shifting perspectives, bodies and language to produce a radical challenge to the attempted fixity of hierarchies in mainstream society.

## Discursive Incorporation

The preceding section examined how alterations in language coupled with innovative bodily representation permit a reformulation of the lesbian body. If categories of sex are produced by ideological discourses and are not in any way natural, as Wittig suggests, then manipulation of the discourses allows a

reformulation of those categories: "For as long as oppositions (differences) appear as given, already there, before all thought, 'natural'—as long as there is no conflict and no struggle—there is no dialectic, there is no change, no movement" (*The Straight Mind* 3). Wittig's belief in the discursive production of sexual difference, "the material oppression of individuals by discourses," leads her to recognize that the level of the discursive is where the challenge to authority must take place, *The Lesbian Body* being testament to this (*The Straight Mind* 25). This section examines Wittig's de-hierarchization of three supposedly authoritative discourses, that of medicine, of religion, and of myth, to demonstrate how her lesbianization operates on a larger discursive level in addition to the grammatical and bodily levels discussed above. It is not coincidental that the first of these discourses to which I refer, medicine, is bound up with representing the body and becomes a target for Wittig, as this illustrates her recognition of the intimate relationship between the body and discourse. I discuss religious and mythical discourses because they pervade Wittig's text, and her manipulation of them operates to erase heterosexual perpetuating ideologies which construct sexualized bodies. This section takes three juxtaposed segments of the text and analyzes them closely to demonstrate Wittig's forceful deconstruction of authoritative discourses.

Medical terminology is found not only in the lists of body parts but also throughout the prose segments, as the examples cited above demonstrate. In the lists, parts of an objectified body are laid open before the reader like a blazon. The use of the definite article makes the body parts both specific and general, for "the" can refer to one specific body or can be a collective determiner for any body. The reader's own body is implicitly included in the litany of body parts. The reader might therefore actually be the subject of the description performed by the list. He/she is invited to partake in an objectification of the body, and, by implication, objectification of her/his own body.

Taking an example of one of the lists, it can be seen that categorization and positioning are marked features, as it can be divided into five sections, pertaining initially to areas of the body. The list begins "THE BRACHIALS THE CIRCUMFLEXES



THE MEDIANS THE ULNARS" (*The Lesbian Body* 62). These relate to the arteries, veins, nerves, muscles and bones of the arms.<sup>5</sup> The next area which can be discerned explores the region from the lower back down the legs to the feet: "THE SACRALS THE LUMBAR THE SCIATICS THE FEMORALS, THE SAPHENOUSES THE TIBIALS THE PLANTARS." The following denote nerves and arteries communicating throughout the body: "THE PATHETICS THE RECURRENTS THE SYMPATHETICS THE CARDIAC THE DIAPHRAGMATIC PLEXUS THE BULB THE SPINAL." The description then moves to the face to denote the location of four senses of taste, sight, hearing and smell, followed by the more disparately located sense of touch: "THE FACIALS THE GLOSSOPHARYNGEAL THE OPTICS THE ACOUSTICS THE OLFACTORIES THE NERVE-CELLS." The final section is a breakdown of the blood: "THE GLOBULES THE RED CORPUSCLES THE LEUCOCYTES THE HAEMOGLOBIN THE PLASMA THE SERUM THE VENOUS BLOOD" (*The Lesbian Body* 62). What might appear as a random list of body parts is seen to be constructed as an opening up of categories within categories. This list is a depiction of a contained body in contrast to the unstable boundaries of the decaying, metamorphosing, penetrating and perforated bodies which pervade the text both in the prose segments and in other lists. Medical discourse which sets itself apart as the objective true approach to the body is represented in the text as the lists, typographically, grammatically and semantically segregated from the prose segments. In Bakhtinian terms it would seem to be the ideal authoritative language which sets itself apart and does not enter into dialogue with other types of discourse: "The authoritative discourse itself does not merge ... it remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert: it demands, so to speak, not only quotation marks but a demarcation even more magisterial, a special script, for instance" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 343). Wittig literalizes typographically what Bakhtin refers to here in his conceptualization of authoritative discourse. The list even demarcates categories within itself. It is shown here to order itself according to a rigid logic of categorization and separation.



However, this logic is shown to be a construction rather than a naturally occurring phenomenon, because the language is subject to multiple interpretations, as exemplified by the suggestion of love problems in vocabulary such as "THE PATHETICS THE RECURRENTS THE SYMPATHETICS THE CARDIAC" (*The Lesbian Body* 62). This string of juxtaposed words in a piece of literature might imply a repeated troubling of the heart's emotions in the form of love problems. The suspicion arises as to whether this is official medical terminology. These words are, however, according to the "legitimizing" medical dictionary, specific components of the body: the fourth cranial nerve, a type of artery, the autonomous nervous system and pertaining to the heart, respectively. The duplicity of these words is highlighted by their juxtaposition and blurs the boundaries between medical, literary and vernacular discourses. Medical discourse is shown to be subject to de-hierarchization and infiltration by other discourses, just as the classic contained body is subject to infiltration, decomposition and metamorphosis. Wittig therefore demonstrates that this authoritative discourse can be dialogic.

A further manner in which the vocabulary of this list subtly parodies the authoritarianism of medicine is to be seen in the etymology of the word "sacral." *Stedman's Medical Dictionary* defines this as pertaining to the *os sacrum* or sacred bone, which closes in the pelvic girdle and is "so called because it was believed to escape disintegration and to serve as the basis for the resurrected body." The use of this one word beautifully and humorously debunks the scientific objectivity of medical discourse by illustrating how the etymology of the vocabulary parallels that of the etymology of the discipline of medicine, exposing its origins in mysticism and superstition. The list is a fitting account of a lesbian body "beyond the categories" not only of sex but also of medicine's discourse (*The Straight Mind* 47).

In addition to debunking the authority of medical discourse, Wittig's text also destabilizes another major power, that of religion. Religious discourse is paramount in the very structure of *The Lesbian Body*. The Beacon edition has the text described on its cover as "an erotic female 'Song of Songs'," the Old Testament Book depicting love poems addressed by a man to a woman and vice-versa. One far from sympathetic review parodies Wittig's

redployment of language in terming the book a "sort of extended, and extremely repetitive, Song of Solomona" ("Butch Telegraph" 5). The Biblical Songs have been interpreted by Jews as representing the relationship between God and his people and by Christians as the relationship between Christ and the Church (*Good News Bible*, "Song of Songs" introduction). However, Jean Duffy indicates that in more recent analyses:

The Song of Songs is no longer seen as an obscure allegory on the relationship between man and the church, but as a candid affirmation of human love and sexuality in which the female speaker is quite capable of taking sexual initiative. Wittig's variation on the sacred poem flouts the church's taboos on homosexuality, but it shows a grasp of the source's structure and spirit. (225)<sup>6</sup>

Wittig's blasphemous reworking echoes the Book to some extent in form, sensuousness and pastoral imagery. The Song of Songs also provides an early example of the blazon motif, reworked by Wittig in the lists and fragmentations in the prose segments, in its use of similes in relation to lists of body parts of the beloved. This concerns both the male addressing the female, for example, "Your breasts are like twin deer, like two gazelles. Your neck is like a tower of ivory" (Song of Songs 7. 3-4), and the female describing her lover to other women: "His cheeks are as lovely as a garden that is full of herbs and spices. His lips are like lilies, wet with liquid myrrh" (Song of Songs 5.13). The fact that the protagonists of the Song of Songs have been taken both as individuals and representatives is also echoed in Wittig's text where the "I" and the "you" seem to be simultaneously individuals and more than individuals.

A more specific instance of Wittig's attack on Christian discourse is seen in the segment which describes a weary protagonist walking along a road, falling down, losing consciousness, and being supported by women (*The Lesbian Body* 63). When she can walk no further, the protagonist lies down on a grassy bank and finds she cannot remember the physical features of the addressee. As is usual in the text, the reader is given no explanation as to the context of these events. Just as contextual knowledge is denied the reader, the use of religious discourse in this

segment reiterates a hierarchization of reader positions in that it depends upon the reader recognizing subtle linguistic echoes and being aware of their sources: "When *I* fall for the first time the women support m/e under the arms, with their aid *I* walk. Loss of consciousness flings m/e to the ground again" (*The Lesbian Body* 63). The words "fall for the first time" echo those attributed to a scene represented in the Stations of the Cross: "Jesus falls for the first time." These Stations, comprising fourteen scenes depicting the crucifixion and found on walls of Catholic churches, are further evoked when the protagonist falls for a second time and she is aided by women, both of which feature as Stations. Religious discourse is thus brought into contact with literary and vernacular discourse, as was the medical discourse in the list, and again depends on the reader's knowledge and awareness in assimilating the references. As the list questioned medical discourse in exposing its origins to be in superstition, the choice of echoing these Stations of the Cross exhibits a similar questioning of the authoritative authenticity of religious discourse. The Stations comprise nine gospel scenes and five from popular tradition (*A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* 498). The three suggested here, two of them depicting falls and one where women help the protagonist (Jesus fell three times, and Veronica wiped his face), are extra-Biblical in source. The symbiosis of gospel scenes, from the authoritative Christian text, the Bible, with scenes from popular sources, has formed a concretized fourteen-stage representation around which a form of worship has developed. This exposes the origins of religious discourse to be a fusion of discourses. The Christian claim to the truth of the gospels is made vulnerable in showing forms of worship not only to be originating from this pure "truth" but from multiple sources, thereby querying whether this "truth" is merely one form of vernacular discourse. The reader cannot find authentication by turning to the authoritative Christian text but must look elsewhere. By implication, these texts assume equal credibility or incredibility, as does *The Lesbian Body* in its own analogous patchwork composition.

This segment illustrates how the text's defamiliarizing techniques produce insecurities and ambiguities inconsistent with the claim to "truth" exhibited by an authoritative discourse. The

text does not therefore set itself up as a "truth" to replace that which it is debunking, but instead fosters an arena for engagement and exchange precisely because so much remains open to interpretation. This segment brings into question the authority of the speaker further still in the following quotation illustrating paradoxical logic operating between syntax and semantics. What is grammatically possible might not be semantically possible in terms of conventional divisions between reality and fiction. For example, in this segment, the body is described in the negative. The addressee paradoxically claims she cannot remember the body she is describing:

The gradually assembled features of your face do not take shape in m/y memory. *I* do not see the curve of your breast. *I* have no recollection of your arms your shoulders your back your belly. *I* am unaware that your hair when licked has a delectable taste. Your pubic hairs are not visible in their quadrangular fleece, your slender clitoris and hood prolonged by the winged labia are not to be seen. *I* no longer see your lungs your stomach your bones your blood-vessels. (*The Lesbian Body* 63)

This description does not follow conventional logic. How can the facial features be "gradually assembled" and yet not "take shape" in the addressor's memory, since assembling would seem to indicate formation of a whole, and how can the addressor claim to be unable to recollect parts of the addressee's body or be aware of its taste when she describes them so vividly? The sentence beginning "*I* am unaware that," followed by a statement of fact referring to taste, is a logical impossibility although syntactically the sentence is comprehensible. The protagonist is creating the body of the other whilst denying it.

This questioning of the credibility of the text's own discourse is paralleled in Wittig's use of myth, whereby semantic and syntactic possibilities are also divorced. As Martha Noel Evans suggests, Wittig reconstructs the world of mythology where fantastic creatures, gods and humans co-exist and metamorphosis is commonplace (211). Added to this are the retellings of specific myths with lesbianized protagonists, for example, Ulyssea and Achillea. Wittig frequently presents a nonhuman protagonist without introduction or explanation. One such example is to be



found in the segment where the addressor is torn apart and eaten by the addressee who is a shark (*The Lesbian Body* 64–65). The reader is initially in a position of uncertainty with regard to the bodily nature of the addressee, receiving a description of a body in partial allusions, but never sure whether to take the allusions metaphorically. The word "shark" is presented only three-quarters of the way through the segment. Thus the segment begins with no contextual references: "Fatal the day when *I* go to seek you in the sweet-smelling sea your gaze sliding over m/y shoulders and along m/y flanks. *I* approach you quite suddenly, m/y hand touches your blue glossy skin, a shudder seizes you from head to tail the water agitated furiously all round" (64). The "blue glossy skin" and "head to tail" imply an unusual body, but, in Wittig's fantastic world, it is feasible for the reader to assume this may still be a description of a human with exceptional attributes, as Wittig deconstructs boundaries between human and animal. Upon further reading, Wittig's monstrous lesbian here conjures images of bestiality and sado-masochism, since the addressor seeks out the shark and seems to relish being consumed by it: "[A]lready m/y blood flows in long red streaks visible in the water, it makes you all the more bent on m/y massacre m/y beautiful accursed shark" (64). The closing lines of the segment read:

You lash m/e with your tail in your comings and goings, m/y face is struck on either side, m/y hands no longer able to raise themselves to protect m/y cheeks, all m/y scattered torn fragments are gathered by you and frenziedly devoured, *I* see you silently relish some flakes of m/y flesh in your teeth, *I*'ve done with watching you m/y eater of ordure m/y most nefarious one m/y so disquieting one, happy if *I* can remain a reflection that disturbs your gliding through the water. (64–65)

The "*I*" of the segment therefore has an existence which is extra-corporeal, imagistic and linguistic, the reflection referred to here, capable of seeing its own body being eaten. This image characteristically possesses multiple implications with regard to the relation of the self to the body as both subject and object and of the relation to an other/the Other as reflection.



To summarize this section, therefore, the macro-discourses which Wittig displaces are not finitely replaced by the discourse of *The Lesbian Body*. The discourse of *The Lesbian Body* is itself a participant in exchange, for to be otherwise would be to take on the domineering characteristics of mainstream discourse which Wittig so despises. Her manipulation of these discourses illustrates the conflict between them, as does her representation of the language and bodies of the individual protagonists. Her lesbianized discourse is comprised simultaneously of incorporation and defilement of other discourses in a move which parallels and is interlaced with her representation of the body of the lesbian subject. The defilement is of course positive, since it transgresses boundaries and opens up channels for exchange. The bodily and linguistic dialogues which result are not harmonious but conflict-bound negotiations for position.

## Conclusion

The author side-steps any accusation of sex-specific essentialism to a parodically exaggerated degree. Her trope of the lesbian is inclusive of all that is outside of the heterosexual system, all that is threatening to it, incorporating shifting power relations, unstable bodies and discourses. However, if her definition of lesbian depends upon being outside the mainstream, how, as Butler has observed, would such an identity persist should the objectives of the marginal be attained (128)? Marginal identities based solely on a relation to the mainstream are vacuous once the mainstream has been dissolved. For Wittig, what is outside the heterosexual system is a self-defined point of view not related to the mainstream, a point of view which, although currently a minority, does not need to remain so. Wittig explains this point: "[t]he minority subject is not self-centered as is the straight subject" (*The Straight Mind* 61). Instead it is a subject "whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" (*The Straight Mind* 62). Wittig requires a revaluation of the terms "central" and "marginal," for nothing can be marginal to a center which is everywhere and has no bounds. In this respect, *The Lesbian Body* succeeds in lesbianizing men and women, gods and goddesses, as Wittig intended, and succeeds in

lesbianizing the straight-minded reader for the duration of the text. What once was marginal, defined negatively in relation to the mainstream, not woman, nonhuman, unnatural is also self-defined as having its center everywhere and margins nowhere. Lesbian as trope is employed as a textual device to destabilize and lesbianize the reader. The reproduction of lesbians beyond even the bounds of the text is the result of Wittig's use of lesbian as trope for a point of view. But, does this lesbianized world view bear any relation to the identity for which the non-Wittigian lesbian subject has struggled to maintain a specificity? Does this subject become dangerously engulfed by Wittig's monstrous lesbian or endlessly dispersed and diluted?

The very title, *The Lesbian Body*, provides a framework of lesbianism through which to view Wittig's text. I term Wittig's lesbian "generic" in that it shares with the generic "he" of the English language the ability to simultaneously incorporate and alienate its others. Just as the generic "he" may be viewed as a powerful tool of subordination and erasure under the guise of inclusion, Wittig's lesbian embraces others in order to attain and perpetuate its own power. The genericism of the term in this sense invites a reading which simultaneously upholds and debunks the specificity of the lesbian body trope in an acceptance of the characteristically alternative logic of Wittig's text. One is conscious, as is Wittig, of the freedom of the aesthetic which is not transferable to the everyday:

[T]he paradise of the social contract exists only in literature, where the tropisms, by their violence, are able to counter any reduction of the 'I' to a common denominator, to tear open the closely woven material of the commonplaces, and to continually prevent their organization into a system of compulsory meaning. (*The Straight Mind* 100)

Wittig's trust in the aesthetic does not negate the text's political value which lies in its exhibition of the mechanism by which an alternative logic may operate, thereby acutely challenging what she sees as the ideologically constructed foundational categories of sexed bodies.

*Julie Scanlon is a doctoral student in English at the University of Sheffield, England.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*.

<sup>2</sup> Namascar Shaktini is a proponent of this in her doctoral dissertation *The Problem of Gender and Subjectivity Posed by the New Subject Pronoun "j/e" in the Writing of Monique Wittig*, "A Revolutionary Signifier: The Lesbian Body" and "Displacing the Phallic Subject: Wittig's Lesbian Writing."

<sup>3</sup> This was brought to my attention in Shaktini's doctoral dissertation *The Problem of Gender and Subjectivity* (34).

<sup>4</sup> In the analysis which follows, I am indebted to Mills for both terminology and the illustration of the fruitfulness of transitivity analysis (143-158). The application to Wittig, however, is my own.

<sup>5</sup> My reference guide for the medical terminology is *Stedman's Medical Dictionary*.

<sup>6</sup> Duffy refers the reader to Francis Landy's *Paradoxes of Paradise* for an example of one such analysis.

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## The Ghetto Novels of Guillaume Dustan

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*Daniel Hendrickson and Marc Siegel*

In June 1997, a series of "salons littéraires européens de l'homosexualité" was held in Paris in conjunction with the celebration of Europride, a pan-European gay and lesbian pride festival which takes place in a different city each year. These salons provided the welcome occasion to reflect on the current state of French and other European literatures in relation to homosexuality. More often than not, however, the salons became the site for the public display of a certain discomfort about the subject at hand, especially as it relates to group identity.<sup>1</sup> The salon entitled "Du fantasme en écriture" is a telling example. In contrast to the majority of the salons, which were held in various general bookshops, embassies, and national cultural centers, this event was held in what could easily be called "gay community space," that is, at *Les Mots à la Bouche*, the gay and lesbian bookstore in Paris. The speakers included a handful of more or less established writers, all of whom had written on explicitly gay themes, and Guillaume Dustan, whose first novel had only recently been published. In their opening statements, panelist after panelist exhibited a clear uneasiness with any hint of the communal and in particular with any identification as a gay writer. The moderator then turned to Dustan, who opened his statements in striking contrast to the others, stating unequivocally, "Moi je suis très ghetto."

In the following pages, we would like to consider the implications of Dustan's pithy remark. What does it mean to call oneself "très ghetto?" More specifically, how is this ghetto sensibility manifested in literature? In order to provide a framework for answering these questions, we will examine Dustan's novels in relation to the theory of Guy Hocquenghem. The work of both writers attests to the existence of a sexual ghetto, one not defined by homosexual identity, but constituted through sexual prac-



tices. While our interest here is to introduce readers to the remarkable work of Guillaume Dustan, we also want to argue that Dustan's ghetto novels represent a significant intervention in French debates about sexual minorities.

By the time of the Europride salons, Dustan's first novel, *Dans ma chambre*,<sup>2</sup> had already caused something of a sensation in French gay literary circles, both for its explicit ghetto perspective and for its frank discussion of drug use and sexuality in relation to living with HIV. Undoubtedly, some of the book's allure also lay in the fact that its author had remained anonymous until his appearance at a handful of these literary salons. Though his anonymity is no longer strict (besides his personal appearances, photographs of him have appeared in the gay press), he still maintains the use of his pseudonym. In late 1997, his second novel, *Je sors ce soir*, was released.<sup>3</sup> Both of the novels are written in a spare, matter-of-fact style using first-person narrative, not unlike the novels of Hervé Guibert and other post-*nouveau roman* writers. Aside from stylistic similarities, Dustan and Guibert share an unsentimental attention to the daily experience of living with HIV and an immodesty in depicting the effects of disease on the body and on bodily functions.<sup>4</sup> Dustan's forthright chronicling of sexual adventures, on the other hand, more readily recalls Renaud Camus's pre-AIDS novel, *Tricks*.

*Dans ma chambre* recounts the (mostly) sexual adventures of Guillaume, an HIV positive gay man living in Paris. The novel is solely concerned with those aspects of Guillaume's life that relate to the gay ghetto. Guillaume's occasional references to work or family, for instance, only underscore their relative lack of centrality in his life: "On ne sait jamais ce que les gens font. On s'en fout" (JS 36). Dustan instead gives us an almost obsessively detailed account of ghetto life: evenings spent in bars, discos, and sex clubs; exhaustive descriptions of what people are wearing, hairstyles, musculature, cock size, presence or absence of body hair; and, especially, lengthy accounts of sexual encounters, from "branché sm" to "baise classique," including cataloguing sex toys and safe sex paraphernalia. The novel begins with the demise of one relationship, then follows another from its inception to its end. The narrative ends with Guillaume deciding to take a

job (we still do not know what sort) outside the country (we do not know where) and saying good-bye to his friends in Paris.

Dustan's second novel, *Je sors ce soir*, recounts a single night out at a popular gay dance club, the *gtd* (gay tea dance) after Guillaume has returned to Paris. Here again, the novel is marked by exhaustive detailing, of trips to the toilet (several times), of decisions about what to drink, of the clothes and appearance of other club patrons, or of Guillaume's bodily sensations when the ecstasy he takes kicks in. Once again, the perspective is decidedly, and at times romantically, ghetto, as indicated by Guillaume's observations shortly after arriving at the club.

Je mate en me disant que c'est cool d'être là à nouveau, parmi mes frères du ghetto. Que des pédés. Que des mecs que je peux regarder sans aucun risque de me faire casser la gueule. Même si c'est dans les yeux. Que des mecs à qui ça fait a priori plaisir que je puisse avoir envie d'eux. Un endroit où je n'ai plus à être sur la défensive. Un endroit où je ne suis plus un animal qui attend qu'on l'attaque. Le paradis. (JS 18)

The ghetto space of the gay bar serves here both as a space for socializing and cruising, but also for offering comfort and physical safety.

Dustan's valorization of the ghetto is striking in the immediate context of French debates about "communautarisme ou républicanisme," as it was put in a special section of the gay news magazine *Ex Aequo*.<sup>5</sup> These debates about the position of minorities within the French Republic were first raised, according to Eric Lamien, at the time of the anti-racist movements of the early 1980s (38). However, with the greater visibility of gays in the French media (namely through coverage of Parisian gay pride events in the mid '90s) and, particularly, with the publication of Frédéric Martel's neoconservative history of homosexual liberation in France, *Le rose et le noir*, the question took on specific meaning for sexual minorities. In the special section in *Ex Aequo*, several prominent writers derided "communautarisme" in favor of a universalist republicanism. Larys Frogier, in an essay on AIDS activism in France, has pointed out the deeply conservative nature of these "universalist ideologies of assimilation and tolerance," calling them "mythologized values" which are

touted "even as France is mired in acute racism, flagrant economic injustice, sexual discrimination, and the carnage of AIDS" (347). In their attempt to deny the validity of specific minority concerns within France, supporters of republican universalism often set up the debate in explicitly nationalist terms: French republicanism vs. American-style identity politics. As Lamien summarizes the question:

Pour parvenir à une réelle égalité des droits, les homosexuels doivent-ils s'inscrire dans un processus d'égalité universaliste à la Française, au risque de nier leur identité, ou doivent-ils construire des structures et des représentations communautaires qui leur soient propres, sur un modèle américain, au risque de se couper du reste de la société? (40, emphasis added)

The ghetto as figured in Dustan's novels, however, does not necessarily correspond to or even suggest "un modèle américain." In fact, Dustan's elaboration of the ghetto, as controversial as it may be, is neither without support nor without precedent in France. First, the ghetto perspective of his books seems to generate no controversy whatsoever for either the characters in the novels or for many of their readers. Moreover, the work of Guy Hocquenghem attests to the presence of a highly developed ghetto theory in France at least twenty years earlier. Hocquenghem begins his introduction to *Le Gay Voyage: Guide homosexuel des grandes métropoles* with the following lines:

Je ne connais pas de villes, je ne connais que des ghettos. Des ghettos qui se succèdent, à peine interrompus de gares ou d'aéroports. Cité de la nuit, disait le grand écrivain John Rechy: le Lungotevere s'achève à West Street, le Tibre se jette dans Hudson River, la porte du fond de ce sauna d'Amsterdam s'ouvre sur la salle obscure d'un cinéma de Pigalle. Les Tuileries et Central Park ont le même lion de bronze, et les mêmes ombres tournoient au petit matin dans les allées (9).

Hocquenghem's "ghettos qui se succèdent" comprise an inventory of spaces typically associated with gay male subcultures—bars, saunas, cinemas, and parks. What links these spaces, however, is not necessarily the identity, but rather the practices, of the people who frequent them. Hocquenghem's ghetto is thus

not merely a collection of spaces, but a relationship between bodies and spaces. As Cindy Patton notes in *Fatal Advice: How Safe-Sex Education Went Wrong*, "space and identity converge in complex ways: a body names a place, a body takes names to a place, a body's presence transforms space—new names and a new sense of place arise" (143).

For Hocquenghem, the ghetto also serves as a site where one can hone some very necessary skills for navigating vastly different urban landscapes—that is, where one can learn and perfect the art of cruising: "Un plan de ville, c'est un territoire de chasse. Et draguer, une manière de le lire" (9). The ghetto then is not restricted to a particular part of town, but is "épandu partout." It exceeds the limits of particular spaces because it is a perspective, or a minoritarian sensibility. "En chaque ville, il est une voie d'accès propre aux minoritaires, une sensibilité qui leur est particulière, dans la manière de ressentir ce qui fait le climat d'une cité. Mais cette sensibilité ne se limite pas au 'ghetto', elle donne forme et sens à toute la ville" (10–11). This minoritarian sensibility is cultivated through an emphasis on, as Hocquenghem notes, minor or otherwise trivialized practices, like momentary sexual encounters, and drug and alcohol use.

Dustan's ghetto is similarly constructed around the practices of sex, drugs, and alcohol: "Je vis dans un monde merveilleux où tout le monde a couché avec tout le monde" (DMC 70). Like Hocquenghem, Dustan does not conceive of a ghetto as merely an inventory of spaces. Rather, it is a sexually charged relationship between bodies and spaces, a non-determining relationship that cannot necessarily be transposed from one space to another, from one moment to the next.

Dans ce monde, chacun a baisé avec au moins cinq cents mecs, en bonne partie les même d'ailleurs. Mais les réseaux ne se superposent pas exactement. Les mecs sont plutôt bars. Plutôt boîtes. Plutôt bar-boîtes. Plutôt sauna. Plutôt rézo. Plutôt minitel. Plutôt bruns. Plutôt blonds. Plutôt musclés. Plutôt hard. Plutôt baise classique. On a le choix. Beaucoup de choix. (DMC 70)



The expansiveness of this network of bodies and spaces guarantees the existence of an erotic potentiality but does not dictate where and when it will become embodied.

On the other hand, the expansiveness of the ghetto is not unlimited. As Guillaume reminds us, "il n'y a pas de ghettos partout. Il y a Londres, Amsterdam, Berlin, New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sydney. L'été, il y a Ibiza, Sitges, Fire Island, Mykonos, Majorque" (DMC 75). Even within Paris, the "voie d'accès" to the city is not without its boundaries. For instance, when Guillaume is leaving a friend whom he has met on the street, they kiss each other on the lips. This kiss, as Dustan does not fail to point out, takes place "juste devant les flics" (DMC 47). Though his ghetto behavior here is marked as defiant in relation to "les flics," it is nonetheless positioned in relation to them. Later, he runs into another friend at a swimming pool, where the friend tells him that he has recently found out that he has seroconverted. Dustan writes, "je ne pouvais pas le prendre dans mes bras parce qu'on était dans un endroit public" (DMC 49). It is not without some irony that this incident takes place at the pool at *les Halles*, which is widely known as a cruising spot for men who want to have sex with other men. The use of this public space as a cruising spot mandates a certain disavowal which both affords a degree of safety, but which also requires the maintenance of the space as at least nominally outside the ghetto. Guillaume's hesitation to comfort his friend therefore suggests limits to the transformative potential of the ghetto. The two incidents—kissing one friend and refraining from embracing another—reflect an awareness of these limits, an awareness that though the bodily contact between two men signifies, how and what this means depends on where and when the bodies come into contact.

In the following pages, we will discuss how a particular (and we would say particularly French) notion of the ghetto is elaborated through Dustan's use of language, his fastidious attention to the body, and his provocative descriptions of sexual practices.



## The Ghetto Spoken

The specificity of Dustan's ghetto in the novels is, first and foremost, determined by language. The novels are written in ghetto language, or what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have called "minor language."<sup>6</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, a minor language is not a standard language spoken by a small number of speakers, but rather a destabilizing use of a major language marked by the immediate connection to the political and the importance of collective value. It is constituted through variation on the major language and a deliberate impoverishment or sobriety of this language. Such variation may include, but is not simply equivalent to the use of intimate language, slang, or bilingualism. Each of these linguistic features is prominent in Dustan's novels.

From the very first pages of both of the books, the language is casual and informal. Quotation marks and other aspects of standard French punctuation are never used to convey dialogue, which blurs the boundary between speech and writing and occasionally even makes it difficult to ascertain who is speaking. The narrator immediately uses the tone of familiar conversation and treats the reader as an insider, without so much as a brief introduction. Intimate and not always flattering details about the personal life of the narrator are divulged without explanation or apology. In the opening paragraph of *Dans ma chambre*, Guillaume recounts the logistical problems of sharing an apartment with his former boyfriend:

J'ai laissé la chambre à Quentin. Je me suis installé dans la petite pièce au fond de l'appart pour ne pas les entendre baiser. Au bout de quelques jours, une semaine peut-être, j'ai fini par trouver ça trop glauque. J'ai exigé de récupérer la chambre. Bien entendu Quentin a immédiatement décidé de s'installer dans le salon avec Nico, ce qui faisait que j'étais obligé de taper contre le mur pour les faire parler moins fort au milieu de la nuit quand j'allais bosser le lendemain. Comme ça je pouvais en prime entendre Quentin dire qu'il allait venir me casser la gueule et Nico lui répondre Chéri calme-toi (DMC 11).

The reader is implicated in the intimate space of friends—that is, the intimate space of urban ghetto-oriented gay male friends. In-

deed, throughout the two books the reader is not addressed as an interested outsider, but rather as a knowing member of the group, sharing similar points of reference—bars, clothes, cruising habits, and HIV.<sup>7</sup>

The consistency of this casual style of language is underscored in each of the books by an incident in which, suddenly, the dialogue is rendered in standard, polite spoken French. In *Dans ma chambre*, the narrator has to call the fire department for help with a friend who has passed out in his apartment after overdosing on drugs. The language of the initial phone conversation with the fireman ("Allo bonsoir monsieur" [DMC 115]) and the encounter between the firemen and the overdosed friend ("Allez monsieur, il faut vous lever maintenant" [DMC 115]) is polite and impersonal, in stark contrast to the intimate language of the remainder of the book. The incident of standard French in *Je sors ce soir* underscores the specificity of the circle of friends even more strongly. It occurs when the narrator leaves the club to get something to eat at a nearby fast food restaurant. He and the server at the restaurant speak to each other in the cool, polite terms of French service language ("Vingt francs soixante-dix, vous pouvez patienter un moment, s'il vous plaît?" [25]). Guillaume's conversations with the service people in the club, however, are marked by the immediate use of *tu* and by other signs of informality.

Slang also figures prominently in Dustan's linguistic ghetto. There are several distinguishable types of slang, ranging from general to extremely specific, in evidence throughout the books: the widely used, popular French slang consisting of more or less standard argot (*boulot*, *connard*); spoken abbreviations (*mat*, *appart*, *exta*, *restau*); elements of urban and particularly youth speech, such as the frequent use of *verlan* (*keubla*, *rebeu*, *meuf*); and finally, a specialized sexual slang for certain acts and sex toys, largely confined to urban gay usage.

The use of English also permeates the books, both in the form of anglicisms in the body of a piece of text in French ("C'est cool" [JS 62]) and of English as English, mostly in intermittent dance song lyrics and dialogue with foreigners ("Where are you from in America?" [DMC 136]). Indeed, all dialogue that takes place in English is left untranslated. This would at first thought

seem to be simple bilingualism, as distinct from the bilingualism "in one's own language" that Deleuze and Guattari describe in relation to Kafka and others (*Thousand Plateaus* 105). On closer examination, however, the neat distinction between English as English and French as French in these books breaks down. The presence of English (or rather Englishes) around the world as a result of global capitalism is widely known. What is perhaps less widely known is the position of English in relation to the global expansion of Anglo-American style gay identity and culture. English is the dominant language for this transnational gay culture, in part because of the wider prevalence of English as the new global language, but also because a huge percentage of gay cultural products (films, books, safe sex pamphlets, porno tapes, even queer theory) are in English. Guillaume, for instance, brings back the latest "compil de house," a collection of English-language gay dance club music, from London (DMC 126). Speaking English, then, in this context, is a way of queering oneself, of putting oneself into play in the global gay ghetto. Indeed, traces of English are in wide use throughout the gay scene in Paris, from the names of bars and restaurants (*Le Coming Out*, *Open Café*, *What's Up Bar*) to the terminology used for sex toys and sexual practices (*chaps*, *plugs*, *sling*, *fisting*). In this sense, one could question whether the English in these two novels is really English (in the British or American sense) or rather a kind of queer French.

Finally, Guillaume has a clear sense of his ghetto language as the kind of subtraction that characterizes what Deleuze and Guattari call the "cramped space" of the minor literature (*Kafka* 17). When the narrator is heading out of the club to get his fast food, he notices a sign which says "Toute sortie est définitive." He approaches the bouncer:

Je me penche vers son oreille et je dis, - Si on sort on ne peut plus rentrer, c'est ça? Mais il cligne de l'oeil et il fait, - Vas-y, avec la tête, et en même temps il ouvre la barrière de sécurité pour me laisser le passage, et je sors en disant, - Merci. Tout ça n'a pas duré plus de cinq secondes. C'est ça que j'aime la nuit: la communication réduite à l'essentiel. (JS 24)

Here Guillaume praises the efficiency and brevity of the shared language of the ghetto, even while he engages in a kind of shorthand with the reader that echoes that very trait ("c'est ça que j'aime la nuit"). For Dustan, as for Guy Hocquenghem, *la nuit* is a kind of queer code word for the entirety of the ghetto. At night, a wink of the eye, a head motion, and a bodily movement that clears a way out can convey all that is necessary for one to navigate ghetto spaces. At night one is a man of few words, particularly if the words are well-chosen and are complemented with appropriate bodily posture, gesture, or movement. At night, "on agit seulement. La parole est action. L'oeil aux aguets. Le geste chargé de sens" (DMC 118). If communication can be reduced to the essential, it is in no small part because in the ghetto, the body also speaks. In fact, it could be argued that in the novels of Guillaume Dustan, the body never stops speaking.

### The Ghetto Embodied

Cindy Patton, writing about what she calls sexual vernacular, emphasizes the contextual quality of communication in a sexual ghetto: "The ways of being within sexual cultures are difficult to articulate, their processes of acculturation—their practices—are to some extent unspeakable, unformalizable" (142). For Dustan, since these ways of being cannot be formalized, they must be exhaustively detailed. Indeed, throughout the two books, the care paid to describing what bodies look like and what they do borders on the obsessive.

J'ai les cheveux très courts, mon 501 en cuir noir, des bottes allemandes, un pull camionneur bleu, le col de ma chemise met juste une touche de couleur. J'ai sept ans de gym derrière moi. Un peu de ventre, vraiment peu, ça part en deux semaines si je fais des abdos, le seul truc, c'est les mollets qui sont un peu fins (DMC 30).

For Guillaume and his "frères du ghetto," clothes, haircuts, muscles, jewelry, and piercings serve to convey everything from the most general statements about oneself (whether or not one is a *frère du ghetto* in the first place) to the most specific (what exactly one wants to do or have done sexually), as well as anything in between. Sometimes bodily appearance establishes one as a



part of a well-established subculture (for example, the wearing of leather to signify "branché sm"). At other times, details of appearance speak only for a particular sexual act, and can be changed at will, as for example in the signaling of "passif/actif."

The terms "actif" and "passif," and their American counterparts "top" and "bottom," bear some discussion, due to their multiple implications in gay culture. "Top" and "bottom" are by no means simple, discrete categories, nor is there even any general agreement on exactly what the terms imply. They are used, particularly within SM culture, to refer to general ideas of dominance and submission, often bearing little or no relation to specific sexual activities. The sense in which they are most widely used, however, is solely to indicate the role taken in anal sex. Even this fairly straightforward use, however, begs the question of how strict these roles are, whether or not they apply to individual acts or to general personality traits. Additionally, for many men roles in anal sex have complex associations with issues of masculinity and sexual identity. Dustan, in an interview in the gay magazine *Têtu*, notes, "certains se disent pédés, mais strictement actifs, comme si le fait de ne pas se faire enculer les rendait un peu moins pédés que les autres. L'actif est mis en valeur, alors que le passif est généralement considéré comme une salope" (28). Furthermore, the division between top and bottom is only useful (which is to say, erotically charged) to a certain percentage of gay men. Many gay men conceive of their sexuality and their relation to specific sexual acts entirely outside these categories. Added to the complex set of meanings already at play, the particulars of HIV transmission have generated a whole new set of ramifications which are not easily superimposed on existing assumptions. The wide discrepancy in the level of risk between the active and the passive partner in anal sex has restigmatized the desire to be penetrated, marking it as both unmasculine and unhealthy.

It is in this complicated context that Guillaume deliberates about the signals he's sending at the *gtd* (gay tea dance). At one point in *Je sors ce soir*, after dancing a little while, Guillaume takes off his T-shirt and details the process of deciding what to do with it.



Au lieu de le laisser pendre bêtement derrière, je fourre les dix premiers centimètres, assez pour être sûr de ne pas le perdre, dans le dos entre le slip et le jean, pas tout à fait au milieu, un peu du côté gauche, pour indiquer que je ne suis ni 100% actif – ce serait carrément au gauche – ni 100% passif – ce serait carrément à droite – mais les deux. Donc je me mets au milieu, mais un peu à gauche, parce que si je le mettais pile au milieu, ou au milieu vers la droite, ça voudrait dire que je suis actif-passif mais plutôt passif, donc en réalité total passif. (JS 23)

His lengthy deliberation here, like many other such deliberations in the books, does not so much reflect Guillaume's uncertainty as it does his acute awareness of the complexity of the system of signification.

Clothes and haircuts are the primary markers of bodily appearance throughout *Dans ma chambre*, but in *Je sors ce soir*, the role of muscles and body hair assume greater importance. At the *gtd*, Guillaume has a clear sense of not having the right kind of body. Shortly after arriving at the club, he complains, "je n'ai pas confiance en mon corps" (JS 21). Later, when he's on the dance floor, he has a minor crisis over the state of his own body:

Tout le monde bouge son corps sublime. Et juste à ma droite apparaît un corps encore plus sublime que tous les autres. Le t-shirt monte lentement au-dessus des épaules pour révéler un torse où chaque muscle est, non seulement énorme, mais encore parfaitement défini. La chose se met à bouger. Je remonte, ça va me calmer, en haut c'est plus populaire. (JS 37)

The body here, hardly a human being at all ("la chose"), appears not as an object of attraction in any real sense, but only as a reminder of the inadequacies of Guillaume's own body. Here the muscleman seems to fulfill its stereotype in gay culture as a hypermasculine ideal which is simultaneously attractive and oppressive. But the function of muscles in the urban gay ghetto is not so simple. The muscular body does not only indicate strength and virility, it can also indicate health. In a community that includes many people with AIDS, being too thin can become equated with being ill. Being muscular, then, is one possible—even if irrational—method of stemming off illness, of not wasting away.

The idea of the muscleman's body as oppressively hyper-masculine is called further into question by its relation to the *actif/passif* divide. At one point Guillaume complains to his friend, Jean-Luc, about the prevalence of musclemen at the club. "C'était pas comme ça il y a dix ans, maintenant Paris c'est comme Los Angeles, j'ajoute en exagérant tout de même un peu." Jean-Luc reassures him, "Ouais mais tu sais, la plupart c'est des passifs, alors avec la concurrence ils ont intérêt à être super-bien foutus. Quand t'es actif, tu trouves toujours, c'est pas pareil" (JS 47). This line of reasoning echoes both the general stereotype that the majority of gay men are "passifs," and also the specific incident earlier when Guillaume decided to hang his T-shirt slightly to the left (again, left signifying active). "Comme je ne suis pas assez bodybuildé je la joue actif en pensant que j'aurai plus de chances" (JS 23).

The consistent though ambiguous role played by body hair in *Je sors ce soir* further attests to the complexity of signification in the ghetto. When the bouncer at the door to the club flirts with him, Guillaume decides that he's "faisable: bouche charnue, beaux lobes d'oreille, pas mal de poils dans l'échancrure de sa chemise noire." He then puts a couple of fingers between two buttons of the bouncer's shirt and finds even more hairs. Dustan writes, "je me dis que ça serait sûrement excitant comme confrontation, les siens et les miens" (JS 26). Here, body hair is clearly presented as sexually desirable, though not entirely in the same way as other physical attributes, attractive ear lobes for instance. For body hair in this context offers Guillaume the possibility of a sexual confrontation, a matching of his own hairy chest with that of another.

Later, however, body hair is presented as unappealing. Guillaume is standing shirtless in front of the mirror in the bathroom when a man comes out of one of the stalls and says, "Oh la la, t'es poilu dis donc!" The two men begin to discuss the relative merits of body hair. "Remarque, il y en a sûrement qui doivent aimer ça, il ajoute. -Ouais, j'ai plein de fans, je dis en marrant. - Mais quand même, les poils, comme ça, ça sent, il dit. -Tu délirés, je dis, moi, je sens toujours bon...je sens de miel" (JS 47). The man's comments indicate not only that he personally can't see anything attractive about body hair, but that he assumes

hairlessness to be the standard of beauty. He says, "il y en a sûrement qui doivent aimer ça," as if consoling Guillaume for this bodily defect.

The next mention of body hair firmly establishes that, indeed, "il y en a sûrement qui doivent aimer ça." Guillaume runs into someone with whom he had sex seven or eight years earlier and is introduced to the man's English boyfriend. Dustan writes, "Il me regarde avec attention. En fait, je pourrais même dire qu'il m'examine." The Frenchman then explains, "Il aime les poils." Guillaume decides that the Englishman isn't particularly desirable, in part because "je n'aime pas trop les mecs à peau claire et imberbe" (JS 52). As in the incident with the bouncer, body hair is presented as desirable, but again only in relation to a specific person's desire. No general theory of attraction is extrapolated.

The final mention of body hair in the book encapsulates these competing ideas about its sexual appeal and clearly engages the question of a standard of attraction. Guillaume is standing with several friends when "une petite folle" walks by and says, "Hou la la! Faut raser tout ça!" Guillaume doesn't respond; he simply looks at his friends and remarks, "C'est jeune" (JS 83). Here the insistence on shaving to appear hairless is denigrated as immature or at least youthful ("C'est jeune"), un-masculine ("petite folle"), and not even worthy of a direct response.<sup>8</sup> Immediately afterwards, however, Guillaume reflects, "Je suis le seul avec un autre mec à ne pas avoir le torse rasé" (JS 84). The assessment of the desirability of body hair has now shifted from focusing on the presence or absence of hair on a particular body to the choice to shave one's hair or not. While body hair is initially presented as a question of body type, it now becomes another gauge of social customs or fashions.

This extended commentary on the varying signification of muscles and body hair in Dustan suggests that while bodily appearance takes on specific meanings in the ghetto, these meanings do not congeal into a single standard of attraction, though at times they may function as such. In other words, certain aspects of bodily appearance can be charged with meaning, but since these meanings are not formalizable, they can function simultaneously in different, even opposing ways.

## The Ghetto Sexed

The communicative aspects of the body's appearance along with gestures, facial movements, and eye contact work together to facilitate sexual encounters. For we can never forget that Guillaume's ghetto is first and foremost a sexual ghetto:

Le sex est la chose centrale. Tout tourne autour: les fringues, les cheveux courts, être bien foutu, le matos, les trucs qu'on prend, l'alcool qu'on boit, les trucs qu'on lit, les trucs qu'on bouffe, faut pas être trop lourd quand on sort sinon on ne pourra pas baiser (DMC 75).

Participation in a sexual ghetto implies a certain self-consciousness about sex, or rather a certain valuing of sex. This is to say that sex is deemed important, worth thinking about, worth spending time and money on, worth improving, and worth talking about. For Dustan it is not a matter of claiming a gay identity and frequenting gay spaces, one must dedicate oneself to sex. Speaking about coming out in the *Têtu* interview, he says, "ils disent s'assumer, mais beaucoup n'ont pas voulu réellement s'interroger sur leur sexualité" (28).

Sex in Dustan's ghetto, thus, does not come naturally, but must be learned. Fortunately the ghetto offers many possible teachers: porno films; lovers ("Je pense à Quentin parce que c'est lui qui m'a appris à retirer les godes avant de jouir, pour ne pas endommager les sphincters" [DMC 34]); sex toys; and oneself ("Ça c'est moi qui me le suis appris tout seul" [DMC 34]). Furthermore, this learning process and the skills acquired thereby are what give sex its emotional value. When, after having sex, a trick tells Guillaume that he is "très ému," Guillaume asks him why: "Il a dit Parce que j'ai bandé sans me toucher pendant tout le temps que je t'ai fisté. J'ai dit C'est normal, c'est parce que tu l'as bien fait, moi quand je godais bien mon ex ça me faisait triquer comme un fou" (DMC 109). The emotional value of sex here never loses its sexual specificity. After all, the sign of being "très ému" is to "triquer comme un fou." In a similar manner, the monogamous couple, the standard legitimizing framework for emotion in relation to sexuality, loses its primacy. Guillaume describes the "mille mecs avec qui j'ai baisé" even as he tells his current lover that he's in the top four (DMC 26). For Guillaume,



then, sex derives its emotional meaning not from any extra-sexual sources, but from the well-performed sexual act itself—both as singular event and as part of a series of sexual encounters.

One of the most significant features of Dustan's ghetto, and one that of course distinguishes it from that of Guy Hocquenghem nearly twenty years earlier, is the presence of HIV/AIDS and the depictions of safe, and most importantly unsafe sex. Since the successful incorporation of safe sex practices within the lives of gay men in the 1980s and early '90s, depictions of unsafe sex have been almost non-existent, except as included as an aspect in the standard confessional of how one became infected.<sup>9</sup> Recent debates in the US have focused attention on the persistent occurrence of unsafe sex, specifically on the fact that people, though cognizant of safe sex information, may still have unsafe sex.<sup>10</sup> Unwilling to address the complexity of reasons why this may be occurring, several prominent American gay journalists have reacted with moralistic and condemnatory attacks, going so far as to discourage any discussion of these important issues. Dustan, again in the *Têtu* interview, implies that the situation is similar in France. "Lorsque j'écris, je tiens à tout dire, même ce qui est dérangeant, c'est pour cela que j'ai parlé de baise sans capote. Cela existe, mais personne n'ose parler" (28).

The particularities of AIDS in France bear mentioning here. Notoriously, France has nearly four times the instance of HIV infection of its European neighbors, a fact which has often been explained in terms of the peculiarly French relation to identity and community. France has not had the kind of gay community base from which other countries have developed both a pedagogy and a practice of safe sex. Of course, major health crises do not arise out of singular causes, but the peculiar French resistance to identity-based communities has undoubtedly prevented the formation of the institutional structures and community specific strategies which have been enormously successful in other parts of the world. So, when Dustan says "personne n'ose parler," the structures and the authority by which this silencing is enforced are significantly different from those by which nobody dares speak in the US. Certainly Dustan can draw on the French literary tradition of transgressive sexuality to say things which would be completely unacceptable in an Anglo-American con-



text.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, he doesn't refrain from recounting the almost mythological pleasures of this forbidden kind of sex. He describes how, for certain people, having unsafe sex takes precedence over all other sexual concerns. "En fait ce qui les intéresse c'est de se vautrer dans le foutre empoisonné, c'est une baise romantique et ténébreuse, je dis ça de façon condescendante, mais c'est vrai que c'est très fort" (DMC 133). But the transgressive alone is not enough to account for the frankness with which unsafe sex and the complications raised by its occurrence are treated in the novels. The characters consider a wide array of factors regarding sex, health, and risk level to varying degrees of consciousness and concern.

The first reference to unsafe sex in *Dans ma chambre* establishes the prevalence of HIV infection among gay men. A friend is talking about a particular sexual encounter when Guillaume asks if it was with or without a condom. The friend answers, "Tu sais personne ne met plus de capotes, même les américaines, maintenant tout le monde est séropositif, je ne connais plus personne qui soit séronégatif" (DMC 47). Guillaume realizes that, with the exception of his former lover, he doesn't know anyone negative either. This knowledge of living in a community with a high prevalence of HIV infection clearly affects decisions that Guillaume and others make regarding unsafe sex throughout the two books, as does more specific knowledge about HIV status, t-cell counts, and other health factors. Toward the end of *Dans ma chambre*, Guillaume responds to someone that he meets on the *minitel* whose pseudonym is "Bze sans kpote." Guillaume tells him that he wants to fuck him without a condom, but the man says that "il avait plutôt envie de baiser que de se faire baiser ce soir" (DMC 134). Guillaume doesn't want to agree to this, and the man decides not to come over. Dustan then makes it clear to the reader that the reason for his reluctance to get fucked without a condom is that his health hasn't deteriorated enough yet. He promises himself that "quand je serai descendu au dessous de deux cents t4, je m'y mettrai" (DMC 134). Here, Guillaume raises the important notion of different kinds, or levels, of despair in relation to making decisions about unsafe sex. His explanation of the difference between the degrees of risk

that he and the other man are willing to engage in is that "nous n'avions pas le même désespoir" (DMC 134).

One occasion in which unsafe sex occurs, described in a section appropriately entitled "Living in the Ghetto," succinctly shows the complex influences and values that can come into play. After having had dinner with a few friends, one of whose lover has just died, Guillaume is having trouble keeping an erection while he is trying to fuck his current boyfriend, Stéphane. He is vaguely depressed, though it is not entirely clear if that has any direct relation to the news of his friend's death. After a handful of botched attempts, he says:

Je débandais. J'ai fini par lui dire un tas d'horreurs. T'es pas excitant, tu me surprends pas, tu me fais mal les seins, je m'emmerde dans ton cul, excuse-moi en ce moment je suis déprimé, je préférerais que tu me baisses. Ou alors je te baise sans capote. Il m'a dit Baise-moi sans capote. J'ai rebandé instantanément. (DMC 68)

A few minutes later, he tells Stéphane that he wants to come, and Stéphane tells him to go ahead. Dustan writes, "J'ai dit Je pense qu'il vaudrait mieux attendre le résultat de ton test. Le test, il ne l'a jamais fait. Il est persuadé qu'il est séropo de toute façon. C'est moi qui l'ai poussé à le faire" (Ibid.). He decides to withdraw and come outside of Stéphane. A week later, they learn that Stéphane's test results are negative. "Je me dis que j'ai bien fait de ne pas jouir dans son cul. Et puis je me sens seul. Déçu. Et puis seul" (DMC 69).

In this incident, the factors that come into play are numerous—the excitement of transgressive sex, the fatalism of the HIV negative, the persistence of conscious deliberation throughout the sexual encounter, and the desire not to be alone with HIV—but they are all shot through with the fatigue of living in a perpetual state of emergency. This fatigue is constitutive of the communal response to living with HIV. In *Je sors ce soir*, for example, Guillaume runs into an old friend with whom he trades news about acquaintances. "Je demande des nouvelles d'un autre type qu'on connaît d'une association sida qui avait dit à dîner il y a quatre ans que maintenant il baisait sans capotes avec son mec parce qu'il en avait marre" (JS 28). Perhaps not everyone

has "le même désespoir," but no one seems to be able to escape it altogether.

Despite the many incidents of unsafe sex that are either described or referred to in the books, the value of safe sex remains firmly in place. Two examples illustrate this clearly. In *Je sors ce soir*, Guillaume runs into someone with whom he was involved in a group sexual encounter in which there was unprotected anal sex. He proposes having a private scene, but the man isn't interested. Guillaume consoles himself by saying, "Donc, tout est bien. Et puis, ça me fait quand même une occasion de baiser sans capotes en moins" (JS 36). Despite the fact that Guillaume is and has been HIV positive for years and has had many experiences of unsafe sex in that time, he still sees a value in having one less unsafe encounter.

The second example is from *Dans ma chambre* and takes place in a sex club. Guillaume is fucking a man in a sling without a condom. Shortly thereafter another man arrives on the scene.

Instinctivement, je suis plaqué contre le cul du mec pour empêcher l'autre de voir qu'on baisait sans capotes. Il a vu quand même. Il est parti. J'ai continué. J'ai senti que ça venait. Je me suis dit Est-ce que je jouis dedans, de toute façon c'est ça qu'il veut. Et puis je suis sorti et j'ai giclé par terre. (DMC 142)

The fact that Guillaume refers to the obscuring of his condomless cock as "instinctive" seems to reflect a bodily knowledge that unsafe sex is not generally acceptable. That Dustan does not attribute any reaction to the witness or any explanation for his departure underscores the communal quality of that unacceptability by refusing to locate it in an individual per se. In the public space of the sex club, Guillaume's desire not to be perceived as having unsafe sex then ironically attests to one aspect of the successful safe sex pedagogy—the establishment of safe sex as a community norm. However, despite his rationalization about his sex partner's desire, he still withdraws without explanation and ejaculates on the ground. This incident, together with those discussed above, highlights the complex process of negotiation that one confronts when having sex in the ghetto.

Though pervaded with different levels of despair, Guillaume Dustan's ghetto is not without hope. But like despair, this hope







also manifests itself through the body. In a rare moment in which Guillaume questions the value of his sexual practices, he finds himself recalling the lines spoken by Jeanne Moreau to her niece in a recent American movie, "Non, je ne pense pas que tu es stupide. Je pense que tu as perdu espoir" (DMC 73). Moreau then suggests that her niece wait and do absolutely nothing, for only then will hope return. Guillaume decides to accept Moreau's suggestion. He refrains from cruising on the *minitel* and from going out to a bar and simply waits: "Au bout de quelques moments effectivement, l'espoir est revenu. Il est revenu par la jambe gauche, je l'ai senti. Un apaisement musculaire" (DMC 73-74). In this amusing incident, the body which serves as the site of pleasure and of disease remains as well a possible site of hope. Though this bodily hope is made explicit here, it is no less present throughout the novels in the obsessive attention that Dustan pays to the physicality of the body. In a time when bodily desire has been stifled both by anti-sex hysteria in relation to AIDS and by the weight of safe sex information campaigns, the enabling of new possibilities for the body is one possible answer to Cindy Patton's call to rediscover "the complex of possible erotic practices that our bodies *already know*" (169).

These erotic practices of the body serve to locate and define the ghetto, much more than buildings ever could. Pat Califia, in an article about the red light districts in the city, alludes to this interplay of bodies and spaces when she notes that certain sexualized zones of the city, which are only so at night, may be unrecognizable as such during the day (205). Guy Hocquenghem expresses a similar notion in a description of the Tuileries, which only becomes activated as a ghetto space after hours: "Vous comprenez, quand ça ouvre au public, ça ferme pour nous" ("Oiseau" 166). Of course, nothing intrinsic to time makes these zones miraculously change as the sun goes down. The change is occasioned by the presence of sexualized bodies, bodies which, like those in Dustan's novels, already know how to turn certain spaces into a sexual ghetto. Perhaps, in the end, this is the great scandal of Dustan's books. Rather than engaging in the abstract debate about what might be the correct position for French homosexuals to take in relation to their minority status and identity, *Dans ma chambre* and *Je sors ce soir* simply attest to an al-

ready existing minoritarian sensibility, a ghetto, based on sexual practices and manifested through bodies.

*Marc Siegel is a doctoral student in Critical Studies in the Department of Film and Television at the University of California at Los Angeles.*

*Daniel Hendrickson is an independent scholar.*

## Notes

We would like to thank Vivian Sobchack for her comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

<sup>1</sup> Edmund White has noted the paradox that "the country that produced some of the most renowned homosexual writers of this century—Marcel Proust, André Gide, Jean Genet, Jean Cocteau—is also today the country that most vigorously rejects the very idea of gay literature" (340–341).

<sup>2</sup> References to this work will be cited in the text, using the abbreviation "DMC."

<sup>3</sup> References to this work will be cited in the text, using the abbreviation "JS."

<sup>4</sup> Virtually all of Guibert's novels are exemplary of this style. For works which explicitly treat AIDS, see *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life*, *The Compassion Protocol*, and *Cytomegalovirus: Journal d'hospitalisation*.

<sup>5</sup> Not coincidentally, this dossier is found in the same special issue of the magazine devoted to the Europride celebrations.

<sup>6</sup> For a thorough discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the minor in language and literature, see their *Thousand Plateaus* 75–100 and *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* 16–27. See also Deleuze's discussion in *One Manifesto Less*.

<sup>7</sup> The straightforward presentation of events and concerns once again echoes the style of Hervé Guibert's novels, as does the unstable relation between autobiography and fiction. In *Dustan*, however, the connection between individual and community is much stronger.

<sup>8</sup> The denigration of the feminine is a disturbing presence in *Dustan's* ghetto. In *Dans Ma Chambre* for instance, Terrier recounts to

Guillaume a sexual encounter with a man who has "le matos qu'il faut: pinces, godes, chaps en latex, slip en cuir. Terrier me dit Ouais mais je le trouve trop féminin et j'aime pas ça, moi il me faut un mec plus solide" (98). This eroticization of the masculine seems to exclude even the possibility of male femininity as desirable.

<sup>9</sup> For information of the safe sex pedagogy in the US in the 1980s, see Patton 3–34.

<sup>10</sup> Excellent overviews of the situation in the US can be found in Warner and Bronski.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the French literary tradition of the transgressive in relation to AIDS, see Worth 93–95.

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In contrast to fashionable methodologies that dissolve the human in the fractal complexity of cultural differences, generative anthropology (GA) is founded on the "originary hypothesis" that all cultural phenomena derive from the hypothetical scene in which humans first became human by using language. The originary purpose of human language is to defer mimetic violence by permitting each to possess the sign of the unpossessable desire-object—the deferral of violence through representation.

GA seeks to transcend the impasse between the humanities imprisoned in the "always already" of cultural systems and the empirical social sciences that cannot model the paradoxical generativity of these systems.

*Anthropoetics* is open to any work of quality in the humanities or human sciences that involves fundamental reflection on the human. Past issues include special numbers on René Girard (Spring/Summer 1997); Religion (Spring/Summer 1997); Wolfgang Iser (Fall/Winter 1997–98); and Deconstruction (Spring/Summer 1998).

A complete statement of editorial policy may be found at the WWW site. Texts or inquiries should be sent to:

*Anthropoetics*

UCLA Department of French  
Los Angeles CA 90095-1550  
[anthro@humnet.ucla.edu](mailto:anthro@humnet.ucla.edu)

## ***Chronicles of Love and Resentment***

**[http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/anthropoetics/  
views/home.html](http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/anthropoetics/views/home.html)**

Eric Gans's weekly WWW column applies originary thinking to subjects varying from epistemology to body piercing, from romantic love to the abortion controversy, from Abelard and Heloise to the films of Quentin Tarantino. The column is distributed by email to GAList subscribers.

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# Women

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## IN FRENCH STUDIES

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The annual subscription is \$12 for the US and Canada and \$24 for overseas (payable in US dollars, postage included). Checks or money orders, made out to **Women in French** should be sent to Adrianna Paliyenko, Department of French, Colby College, Waterville, ME 04901-8846.

For membership forms, contact Yolande Helm, 21 Sunset Lane, The Plains, OH 45780. Membership is \$25 (\$37 Canadian) for full and associate professors (three-year membership, \$70 US), \$15 (\$24 Canadian) for others (three-year membership, \$40 US). Membership includes two newsletters and a copy of *Women in French Studies*.

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**PAROLES GELÉES**

**UCLA**

**Department of French**

**212 Royce Hall**

**Box 951550**

**Los Angeles, CA 90095-1550**

**(310) 825-1145**